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A common thread: Labor, politics, and capital mobility in the Massachusetts textile industry, 1880-1934

Beth Anne English
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A COMMON THREAD

Labor, Politics, and Capital Mobility in the Massachusetts Textile Industry, 1880-1934

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Beth Anne English
2003
APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Beth Anne English

Approved, March 2003

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ABSTRACT

“A Common Thread” is an analysis of the relocation of the New England textile industry to the states of the Piedmont South between 1880 and 1934. Competition from cotton textile mills operating in the South became a serious challenge for New England textile manufacturers as early as the 1890s. As they watched their profits turn into losses while output and sales of southern goods continued apace during the 1893 depression, owners of northern textile corporations felt unfairly constrained by state legislation that established age and hours standards for mill employees, and by actual and potential labor militancy in their mills. Several New England textile manufacturers, therefore, embraced the strategy of opening southern subsidiary factories as a way to effectively meet southern competition by expanding their productive capacities to locations where they could pay their workers less and run their mills without the limitations imposed upon them by state regulations and unionized labor. The Dwight Manufacturing Company of Chicopee, Massachusetts was one of the first New England cotton textile companies to begin operating a southern branch mill, which it constructed in Alabama City, Alabama between 1895 and 1896. Within a thirty-year period, many of the largest textile corporations in Massachusetts would move part or all of their operations from the Bay State to North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama where textile production took place in mills that cost less to fuel, was done by workers whose wages were lower than those paid in New England, and occurred in a region where textile unions and state regulations were virtually non-existent. Many owners of New England cotton manufacturing concerns, including those of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, would eventually abandon their northern factories completely for ones they had originally built as subsidiary mills during the 1890s and early 1900s.

Through the lens of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, “A Common Thread” examines this process of regional transfer within the American textile industry. The specific goals of the study are to explain 1) why and how Massachusetts cotton manufacturing companies pursued relocation to the South as a key strategy for economic survival, 2) why and how southern states attracted this northern textile capital, and 3) how textile mill owners, the state, manufacturers’ associations, labor unions, and reform groups shaped the North-to-South movement of cotton mill money, machinery, and jobs. “A Common Thread” provides a historic reference point for and helps inform on-going discussions and debates about capital mobility and corporate responsibility as the industrial relocation from region to region that occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continues from nation to nation within the context of economic globalization.
A COMMON THREAD
INTRODUCTION

Buried in the business section of the 14 December 2000 late edition of the *New York Times*, a one paragraph article announced, “Company News: Cone Mills to Close U.S. Plant and Expand in Mexico.” On the same day that the Cone Mills of Greensboro, North Carolina announced the closure of a “money-losing division” located in Marion, South Carolina, the company said it planned to spend eighteen million dollars to expand production by thirty-five percent at the denim-manufacturing facilities it operated in Mexico as part of a joint venture with Compania Industrial de Parras.\(^1\) Within two years, Cone recorded the company’s first profitable year since 1994.\(^2\) In a statement released publicizing Cone’s first-quarter profits in April 2002, Chief Executive Officer John Bakane said that he expected the company’s revenues to increase over the remainder of the year but added that in order to do so, “We must reduce our overall cost structure by expanding in Mexico.”\(^3\) Extensions into Mexico were part of an ongoing company “reinvention plan” which also included cutting nearly 1,000 U.S. jobs from the Cone Mills’ payrolls. Cone officials argued, “We’ve got to go there” in order to supply jeans makers who had also “moved production south of the border.”\(^4\)

After years of such textile mill closures throughout the United States, stories began appearing in the pages of local newspapers with tales of the miraculous

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\(^2\) *Greensboro News and Record*, 23 October 2002.
\(^3\) *Women’s Wear Daily*, 25 April 2002.
\(^4\) *Greensboro News and Record*, 23 October 2002.
transformations of old mill complexes into trendy residential lofts and artist studios, museums, outlet and antique malls, and NASCAR garages and repair facilities, evidence of "how defunct manufacturing centers of today can become the boom towns of tomorrow."\textsuperscript{5} But, every permanent mill shutdown has a human cost that cannot be measured by the successes of city revitalization projects meant to breathe new life into old industrial districts. The process of capital movement, mill closures, and job loss has life-altering consequences. During 2001 alone, over one hundred mills in the U.S. ceased production and more than 148,000 workers in the textile and apparel industries lost their jobs.\textsuperscript{6} Federal and state programs create temporary safety nets for "displaced workers" in the form of unemployment benefits and vocational training programs, but for many, the loss of a textile mill job means ongoing struggles to "get by" on lower paychecks earned in the service sector. For some, like North Carolinian Farrie Holt, the loss is permanent. "At 71, she figures no one wants her. She applied at other mills, at retail stores. Nothing," noted Amber Veverka of the \textit{Charlotte Observer}. "No one," Veverka added, "apparently has studied what happens to such workers long term."\textsuperscript{7} Martinsville, Virginia resident and former textile mill worker Mary Lou Ramey spoke for many when she said, "It's like all we've ever known is textiles; it's all we've ever done . . . . I do not have a clue as to where I'm gonna go and what I'm gonna do."\textsuperscript{8}

Plant closings have become endemic in the United States, a phenomena described by Steven Greenhouse of the \textit{New York Times} as "the infection that has hit so much if


\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Charleston Gazette}, 5 January 2002.

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Charlotte Observer}, 27 October 2002.

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Charleston Gazette}, 5 January 2002.
industrial America." The loss of manufacturing jobs in the U.S. and the exodus of industrial capital to other parts of the world have spurred debates over whether protectionism or working to raise global labor standards is the most effective way to halt capital relocation and mitigate the hardships caused by unemployment and deindustrialization. While appearing to be a new problem, in reality, capital flight and the dialogue about effective strategies to meet it have been ongoing for over a century.

Between the 1890s and 1920s, many of the largest textile corporations in Massachusetts moved part or all of their operations from the Bay State to North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama where textile production took place in mills that cost less to fuel, were taxed at lower rates, was done by workers whose wages were lower than those paid in New England, and occurred in a region where textile unions and state regulations were virtually non-existent. The Dwight Manufacturing Company of Chicopee, Massachusetts was one of these New England textile corporations. Founded in 1841, the Dwight Company opened a southern mill in 1896 and in 1927, the Dwight Company abandoned its northern facilities completely. Dwight’s corporate officers were very vocal about the conditions in Massachusetts that “pushed” the company to move while those in Alabama “pulled.” Its southern operations became a lightening rod for both praise and criticism by mill owners, mill village apologists, advocates of child labor reform, and organized labor. The late nineteenth and early twentieth-century discourse about Dwight’s decision to open a subsidiary mill in Alabama and its eventual move out of Massachusetts predicts much of the modern dialogue about globalization.10

10 On the use of case studies as a valuable framework for examining capital mobility trends as they occur in various industrial settings, see Charles Craypo and Bruce Nissen, eds., Grand Designs: The Impact of Corporate Strategies on Workers, Unions, and Communities (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1993), 7; Jefferson
The Dwight Manufacturing Company provides a lens through which one may better see the process of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century regional relocation of the American textile industry as well as ongoing global migrations of capital. Because the Dwight Company generated an inordinate amount of public comment and left a treasure-trove of corporate records, its history reveals the decision-making that led to the relocation of production facilities from one region to another. Not surprisingly, the Dwight story confirms that manufacturing businesses abandon high-wage areas for low-wage ones in the ongoing quest for lower production costs and higher profits. But while the history of the Dwight Company illustrates that capital relocation and its underlying causes are not new, it also shows that plant closures and removals can be prevented.

Conventional wisdom dictates that the disparity of northern and southern production costs caused by low wages, long hours, limited unionization, and scant regulatory legislation, which typified the textile industry in the states of the Piedmont South, made the permanent repositioning of the center of the American textile industry southward inevitable. Analysis of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, however, reveals points at which the process of industrial removal from New England to the Piedmont South could have gone very differently. For the Dwight Company in the 1890s and many other New England textile producers starting in the 1920s, capital mobility was the strategy of choice for dealing with southern competition. New England textile unionists, although conscious of the disparity of conditions that existed between northern and southern mills and the possibility that a union presence in the Piedmont South could

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bring wage and hours standards between North and South closer together, embraced a policy whereby they worked to strengthen their union base in the Northeast before attempting to organize their southern counterparts. As New England mill relocations to the low-wage, open-shop South accelerated in the 1920s, the unionists' "North first" strategy left them without the power, numbers, or resources to effectively combat the deindustrialization of textile towns throughout the Northeast. As such, New England operatives were in the position of reacting to a process that mill owners had long since set in motion. Understanding the choices made by textile operatives locally, regionally, and nationally in the process of Dwight's relocation to Alabama and why textile unionists in New England retreated to a local-regional approach to organizing and securing protective legislation rather than pursuing a national one, can inform the development of useful strategies for today's workers and communities so that they might anticipate change and be proactive in meeting the challenges presented by mobile capital.

Jefferson Cowie found a similar process of capital relocation at work within radio manufacturing giant, RCA. Cowie documented RCA's relocations from Camden, New Jersey to Bloomington, Indiana between the 1930s and 1960s, and, later, to Memphis, Tennessee and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico in the company's perpetual search for cheap and "controllable" labor. The stories of RCA and the Dwight Manufacturing Company differ significantly because of the periods in which each company relocated, the dissimilarities of production in the electronics and textile industries, and the ways each industry developed nationally and globally. Both Capital Moves and "A Common Thread," however, point to the need for workers in the manufacturing sector to create broad networks of solidarity by, in Jefferson Cowie's words, creating a "shared sense of place"
that moves beyond local and national priorities. U.S. unions in the twenty-first century, as was necessary for New England textile unionists a century ago, need to fundamentally alter how they use their financial and political resources and who they organize. Workers in highly developed nations like the U.S. must act to bring about a global equalization of conditions within individual manufacturing sectors so that runaway companies will have no reason to run. The history of the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s relocation demonstrates that it was imperative for New England textile operatives to shift their outlook from local and regional to national at the turn of the century to respond to the implications of “southern competition.” Likewise, it is crucial for twenty-first-century workers to reorient their perspective to a global one.  

While “A Common Thread” is a study of capital mobility, it is also a contribution to the vast and varied body of scholarly literature dealing with the histories of both the New England and Piedmont South textile industries. “A Common Thread” revisits numerous issues with which scholars have dealt in the past, places them in the context of capital mobility, and adds to the existing textile historiography in three broad ways. First, it disengages from the social-cultural methodology used by many historians of the American textile industry that, with few exceptions, has dominated the writing of textile-related history for over twenty years. Beginning in the 1970s, historians who were influenced by the analytical approaches of E. P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman began using new written and oral sources to document a more inclusive history of the American textile industry.  

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England textile corporations reflecting only the view of management, analyses focused on the question of who drove the establishment of the early nineteenth-century New England textile industry, and the ways in which textile manufacturing facilitated the industrialization of the Northeast and the United States.\textsuperscript{13} Shifting the focus to the textile industry’s mill hands, these social historians also fundamentally challenged the portrayals of the turn-of-the-century cotton mill campaign as a grand movement led by the South’s “leading citizens” who intended, first and foremost, to construct textile manufactories as a way provide gainful employment to the region’s poor whites.\textsuperscript{14} Groundbreaking works such as Thomas Dublin’s study of Lowell’s mill girls, and the collaborative Like a Family described the process of industrialization in New England and the New South through the experiences of the textile workers themselves. Dublin and the Chapel Hill scholars emphasized the cultures created within the early nineteenth-century Lowell boarding house system and late nineteenth and twentieth-century southern mill villages, workers’ ongoing negotiations with management as the industry matured in both regions, and textile operatives’ participation in labor militancy and unions. Historians began focusing not just on the workplace, but also on how individuals acted within a context of

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industrial employment to create distinct attitudes and cultures that permeated the boundaries of work and extended into their homes and communities.15

Building on these earlier works, textile industry scholars have gone on to delve deeper into issues such as the nature of workers’ power within the system of southern mill village paternalism, the ways in which various intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, and religion have shaped working-class politics on local and state levels, and the question of why the South and the textile industry as a whole have historically been the least unionized region and manufacturing sector in the United States.16 By concentrating on individuals and their experiences, attitudes, and actions within various


contexts, these studies have allowed a deeper understanding and appreciation of those who have labored in the nation’s textile mills.

This emphasis on worker agency and experiences, however, made mill management and textile companies, as best, minor characters in textile industry historiography. It is impossible to fully understand the actions of one group without studying the motivations of the other and “A Common Thread,” therefore, seeks to rejoin business and labor history. The analysis presented herein reverts to a company-centered approach, albeit one that is not one-dimensional or celebratory as many previous company studies have been. “A Common Thread” is a labor historian’s business history. Through the specific example of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, it investigates how textile manufacturers’ organizations, national textile unions, and their lobbying of state legislatures in Massachusetts and Alabama shaped the development of the textile industry within the Piedmont South and the movement of New England textile capital southward. This institutional focus comes at the expense of an intimate knowledge of the everyday lives of Dwight’s employees in both Chicopee and Alabama City, and at the cost of silencing millhands who were not members of or in agreement with decisions made by the larger organizations. It was through group action, however, that textile workers were most visible, most likely to be heard by management and state politicians, and most able to influence the overall process of capital relocation.

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17 Notable exceptions are Flamming, Creating the Modern South and Clifford Kuhn, Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta’s Fulton Mills (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

18 The process of writing in-depth studies of workers’ cultures caused a fracturing of American history into myriad fields and sub-fields. Numerous historians responded to this loss of synthesis by shifting their focus back to the study of institutions, especially trade unions, which had dominated the Commons’ school approach to labor history and labor historiography through the 1960s. These “new” institutionalists, while seeking synthesis within labor history scholarship, were influenced by the community centered analyses of social historians as well as by the call, first made by Theda Skocpol in...
Seeing these groups at work within the context of one corporation provides an effective framework through which the dynamics of capital movement in the textile industry can be explored on local, state, and inter-regional levels simultaneously. As such, "A Common Thread" contributes to the existing textile literature by embracing an inter-regional focus and incorporating the rise of the southern cotton manufacturing industry with the decline of the northern one into a single story. With the exception of several location theory-driven "migration" analyses, textile studies are overwhelmingly region-specific in their concentration. Economic historians have used location theory to explain how cost-of-production related factors like access to raw materials, proximity to markets and transportation costs, taxes, technological development, labor supply and skill, and prevailing rates of pay, facilitated the investment of capital in certain locations over others. Location theorists' textile industry studies, nevertheless, have not provided substantive analyses of the impact that intangible things, such as New England mill owners' beliefs that their home legislatures were "hostile" to capital while those in the South were "friendly." Location-theory economic studies, moreover, lack detailed investigations into the various strategies used by New England mill owners and textile


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unions to counteract the manufacturing advantages to be had in the South, their effect, and how they changed over time. “A Common Thread” offers a more nuanced discussion and explanation of the underlying reasons for the relocation of textile capital at the turn of the century than that offered by location-theory analyses.19

Only by transcending narrow regional and local boundaries is it possible to fully explore the development of the southern textile industry starting in the 1880s, the growth of competition between North and South beginning in the 1890s, and the precipitous decline of the New England industry during the 1920s. The development of southern industrial booster rhetoric, the promotion and fostering of southern manufacturing “advantages,” the increasing presence of southern-made cotton goods in national and international textile markets, the passage of state labor legislation, and the activities of unionized textile operatives did not occur in regional vacuums. The Dwight Manufacturing Company serves as a much needed “common thread” that ties the northern and southern stories together.

“Enough words have been uttered in the last two decades about the growth of textile manufacturing in the south at the expense of New England’s long established industry” observed American Federation of Labor President William Green in 1929, “to

fill many rows of closely printed books."²⁰ Indeed, "A Common Thread" scrutinizes this pre-1920s period and provides a first chapter of sorts to the body of works dealing with the deindustrialization of the New England textile industry. The majority of these studies, while also suffering from intra-regional myopia, begin in the 1920s and analyze mill closures and the strategies used by owners, unions, state legislatures, and the federal government in their efforts to save the industry through the 1960s. By the 1920s, however, capital flight in the American textile industry and its underlying causes had been realities for over thirty years. Without a study of this earlier period, it is difficult to fully understand the nature of the relationship between the northern and southern branches of the industry and how the issues of wages, hours, and unionization had become such key factors in New England's textile decline between the 1920s and 1960s. Consideration of this earlier era also reveals how labor, management, and the state dealt with the movement of capital from New England to the New South beginning in the late nineteenth century, what succeeded and failed, and how these victories and losses informed the approaches to capital relocation taken by various groups as deindustrialization accelerated in the twentieth century.²¹ Most importantly, "A Common Thread" looks at a time when New England's deindustrialization was not a foregone conclusion, and therefore, provides the best place to look for lessons to be learned from the process of capital mobility as it occurred over a century ago.

²⁰ The Textile Worker, February 1929.
The organization of "A Common Thread" is both chronological and topical. The first chapter provides a brief overview of the founding of the Dwight Manufacturing Company in 1841, its history through the Civil War, and the economic changes that facilitated the growth of the textile industry in the post-Civil War South. It also looks at southern industrial booster campaigns during the 1880s and 1890s, the expansion of southern textile manufacturing, and the initial responses of Massachusetts mill owners to it. This chapter explains the origins of the "southern competition" with which Massachusetts manufacturers increasingly dealt through the 1890s and into the turn of the century. Chapter 2 analyzes why the Dwight Manufacturing Company decided to build a southern branch plant in 1894 and how southern competition, Massachusetts labor legislation, and labor militancy in the Dwight mills were important factors shaping the company's relocation strategy. This chapter focuses on how events and changes that happened on the local level in Chicopee intersected with those that occurred on a statewide level in Massachusetts to create the conditions in which the owners of the Dwight Company decided upon capital mobility as the most effective way to combat southern competition. Chapter 3 provides a complementary examination to the Massachusetts-focused one of the previous chapter, as it examines the reasons why the Dwight Company chose Alabama as the state and Alabama City as the town in which it would build its branch factory. The analysis follows the construction of the Alabama City mill and mill village through the late 1890s, local reactions to the Dwight Company, and the first years of the Alabama City mill’s operation, focusing on the ways in which the company transferred but in many cases modified its "northern" managerial style to work effectively within a new regional context. Chapter 4 discusses the turn-of-the-
century campaigns for child labor restriction in Alabama. It investigates how unionists, middle-class reformers, and the owners of the Dwight Manufacturing Company participated in it, as well as the ways in which the issue of capital mobility became an integral part of the debates over the passage of protective legislation in Alabama.

The fifth chapter of “A Common Thread” moves the story of the Dwight Manufacturing Company into the 1920s and to the closure of Dwight’s Massachusetts facilities in 1927. It pays particular attention to changes in the textile industry during World War I, the postwar depression in textiles, union organization, and labor militancy in Dwight’s Massachusetts and Alabama mills. The final chapter and conclusion of “A Common Thread” look at the role played by Dwight’s Alabama City workers in the 1934 General Textile Strike, the strike’s failure locally, regionally, and nationally, and the short and long-term consequences of the strike’s negative outcome for textile operatives nationwide in relation to ongoing relocations of New England textile capital to the South. The collapse of the strike cemented the non-union, low-wage status quo that continued to attract New England textile capital and was key in the failure of the overwhelming majority of textile organizing campaigns initiated by the Congress of Industrial Organizations throughout the South in subsequent decades. The CIO-affiliated Textile Workers Union of America, however, did eventually claim a textile local at the Dwight Manufacturing Company in Alabama City as one of its few post-World War II organizing successes. But, eight years after a merger between the Dwight Company and the Cone Mills in 1951, Alabama City and the unionized Dwight textile operatives became some of the first southerners to experience the closure of their mill as Cone’s management sought ways to cut costs in the face of increasing foreign competition. Thus, a new cycle of
capital relocations began that mirrored the process of the New England textile industry’s movement southward.
CHAPTER I

"THE ENORMOUS INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF SPINDLES IN THE SOUTHERN STATES . . . IS POSITIVELY ALARMING:" SOUTHERN BOOSTERS, NEW ENGLAND RESPONSES, AND THE GROWTH OF TEXTILE MANUFACTURING IN THE PIEDMONT SOUTH

"The story of the New England cotton industry," wrote historian Caroline Ware in 1931, "is the story of the industrialization of America."¹ Indeed, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, the manufacture of cotton textile goods drove the industrialization of New England. In Massachusetts, Boston merchants invested their monies in spinning and weaving mills along the fall-lines of the Merrimack River in Lowell and Lawrence in the eastern part of the state, and in the Connecticut River Valley in the Chicopee-Springfield area in the central part of the state. Drawing a largely female workforce from an increasing supply of surplus agricultural labor, these entrepreneurs facilitated the creation of the nation’s first full-scale manufactories and entire communities designed for the specific purpose of cotton textile production. In Lowell, Boston investors established the Merrimack Manufacturing Company in 1822, incorporated the Merrimack Lock and Canal Company in 1825, and proceeded to build mills, machine shops, and company-owned boarding houses and tenements in the city over the next twenty years. The "Boston Associates," as this group of investors came to be known, eventually organized several of the largest cotton textile manufactories in the

United States, including the Boot, Tremont, Lawrence, Appleton, Suffolk, Hamilton, Massachusetts, and Prescott Mills.²

As was the case with the beginnings of the textile industry in northeastern Massachusetts, Boston investors principally financed the establishment of large-scale cotton manufactories in the Chicopee-Springfield area.³ By 1820, Chicopee had a base of several small-scale industries, consisting of a paper mill, iron works, and saw and grist mills, but the community remained a predominantly agricultural one. The potential for the Connecticut River’s waterpower to drive the turbines needed to operate looms and spinning machines, however, attracted potential cotton textile investors to Chicopee in the early 1820s. In 1823, the Boston Springfield Manufacturing Company purchased property and water privileges from Chicopee locals, and with $500,000 of capital stock, began construction of a dam on the river to harness it for factory use, a cotton mill, and workforce housing. The Boston Springfield Manufacturing Company, renamed the Chicopee Manufacturing Company in 1828, started work on its second mill in 1825, its third in 1826, and its fourth in 1831. By 1835, the Chicopee Manufacturing Company

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³ Francois Weil notes that members of the Dwight family who invested in Chicopee’s original cotton mills directed their merchant business from Boston by the 1820s, but that their ancestors had lived in and conducted business in the Springfield-Chicopee area as early as the 1750s. Weil, “Capitalism and Industrialization in New England, 1815-1845,” 1342-1345.
was capitalized at $700,000. Boston investors, many with overlapping holdings in the Chicopee Manufacturing Company, incorporated the Springfield Canal Company in 1831, the Cabot Manufacturing Company in 1832, the Perkins Manufacturing Company in 1836, and the Dwight Manufacturing Company, capitalized at $500,000, in 1841. The Cabot and Perkins Mills merged in 1852, consolidating with the Dwight Manufacturing Company and operating under its name in 1856. Within a thirty-year period, the interconnected group of Boston investors who established Chicopee’s four original cotton textile companies had made the city into one of the Bay State’s foremost industrial centers.4

The owners of the Chicopee companies, like other New England textile manufacturers in the 1820s and 1830s, filled their mills with a workforce of farm girls who had been attracted to the factories by the opportunity to earn cash wages there. During the 1840s, mill owners began employing Irish immigrants in the city’s mills, and later culled its operatives from successive waves of French-Canadian, Polish, and Greek and Portuguese workers as they began arriving in Massachusetts in the 1860s, 1880s, and early 1900s. As the ethnic makeup of the workforce of the Chicopee textile mills changed through the mid to late nineteenth century, so too did its gender composition. The workforce shifted from one that consisted almost exclusively of native, female labor to an immigrant one of both men and women. Local businesses that provided needed services for the Chicopee community grew during these years as well, and the Boston-

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based mill owners invested funds to aid in the establishment of city schools, libraries, parks, public services, and utilities.\textsuperscript{5}

The outbreak of the Civil War accelerated Chicopee’s industrial development. Local machine works and facilities that previously made consumer goods operated on augmented schedules and expanded for the purposes of manufacturing war materials and supplies. Production in the city’s cotton mills, however, nearly ceased. Without regular shipments of southern cotton, the mills could not maintain full operations. The mill owners sold most of their raw cotton stocks at huge profits and slashed their workforces and outputs. With an eye on more efficient production and higher profits after the war’s end, the owners of the Dwight Manufacturing Company and the Chicopee Manufacturing Company used the mill shutdowns as an opportunity to update machinery and install auxiliary steam engines that would power the factories when the Connecticut River waters ran low. As late as 1864, the Dwight Company only employed 400 workers. But by 1869, the company had doubled its 1860 productive capacity and reemployed over 1,500 of its pre-war workforce of 1,600 operatives.\textsuperscript{6}

While the Dwight Manufacturing Company and other Massachusetts textile firms returned to full-time schedules through the late 1860s, southerners looked for ways to recover from the devastation wrought by the Civil War and to function within a changing economic system based on free labor. As southerners negotiated this new economic terrain, voices emerged that urged the region to focus on diversified agriculture and industrialization as the means through which the South could rebuild and revitalize itself.

“All of you will recall the story that [Henry W.] Grady told on one occasion in setting forth what advantage it would be to inaugurate manufactories here,” remarked former Southern Cotton Spinners Association President Daniel Augustus Tompkins in 1901, “He said that he attended a funeral in North Georgia, where the grave was dug through solid marble, and yet the marble slab at the head of the grave came from Vermont, that surrounded by a forest of splendid hard wood, yet the coffin came from Cincinnati, that on the hillsides was the best grazing for sheep, yet the shroud came from New England, that while the iron ore was within hearing distance, yet the pick and tools for digging the grave came from Pittsburgh; that all that Georgia furnished for that funeral, was a hole in the ground and a corpse.” But, Tompkins declared, “today this condition has so far changed.” In fact, within a decade of Henry Grady’s 1889 “funeral oration” and his call for the development of industries based on regional resources, manufacturing and extractive industries had taken root in the states of the Piedmont South.

When the Civil War ended, the southern economy and landscape were in ruins. With Dixie’s defeat, many southerners saw industrialization as a necessary step toward modernizing and reintegrating the overwhelmingly rural region into an increasingly urban-industrial nation. Nowhere was this New South mantra, which tied the region’s post-Civil War economic recovery and future prosperity to industrialization, more visible than in cotton textile manufacturing. The textile industry and the postwar South proved a perfect match. Cotton was abundant in the region, textile mill capitalization and start-up costs were relatively low, Piedmont rivers, streams, and coal fields could provide the power to run textile machinery, widespread construction of southern railroads would aid

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in the transportation of raw materials and manufactured goods, and potential mill operatives were readily available. By the 1880s, many New South entrepreneurs embraced the region’s “cotton mill campaign,” believing in earnest that textiles would be the salvation of the South and, as had happened in New England fifty years earlier, would be a seed from which other, diversified industries would grow.

Boosters for this “New South” looked to railroad building, funded in large part by northern investors, as the first step in reorienting the region’s economy toward commercial agriculture, the development of its mineral and natural resources, and the establishment of manufacturing industries based on these. “There are vast mineral, timber, and agricultural reserves as yet totally undeveloped—their extent and richness being only partly comprehended,” noted one industrial promoter, “As new [rail]roads are built, opening up to the world these immense sources of wealth, outside capital will be drawn to the development of the South in even greater abundance than at present.”

Through the 1870s, railroad construction in the South skyrocketed, linking the region to national markets and providing the transportation infrastructure necessary for the success of future commercial enterprises.

Extensive railroad building occurred in the South during the 1870s, but the ongoing instability and reordering of the southern political, social, and economic structure, as well as the national economic depression that began in 1873, hindered the development of other regional industries. New South industrial boosters, nevertheless,

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8 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 5, no. 11.
continued to link regional regeneration with the establishment of local factories that would prepare agricultural products and natural resources into unfinished goods. With recovery from the depression starting in 1879, increasing numbers of southerners began investing in the development of local cotton textile mills. Building on the small base of antebellum mills and cotton manufactories established immediately after the war that had survived the 1873 depression, these New South entrepreneurs facilitated a development of the southern textile industry through the 1880s on a scale much larger and more widespread than the cotton mill construction that had taken place previously. Although aided by credit extended through northeastern textile machine companies and commission houses in exchange for stock subscriptions in the new mills, local monies fueled the establishment of textile mills in the Piedmont South. This was fundamentally different from the direct investments of northern and western capital that facilitated the expansion of much of the South’s railroad construction and the development of the region’s mining and lumber industries. Businessmen and professionals in towns throughout the region, merchants, and large landowners looking for steady profits, funneled large sums of money into local textile manufactories. “The factory is a good specimen of how things are working for us,” Richard Edmonds, editor of the Manufacturers’ Record asserted, “It is the conception of a Southern brain, built with Southern money on Southern soil . . . . Such achievements carry their own lesson, they speak loudly of Southern progress.”

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10 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 5, no. 17.
their enterprises became symbols of the New South, of progress, of regional renewal through industry, and of the creation of a new economic order.¹¹

Transformations that occurred in southern agriculture after the Civil War played an integral part in the late-nineteenth century development of the South’s textile industry. The war brought about a fundamental alteration of the production of small, white-owned farms throughout the Piedmont South. During the antebellum period and through the war, upcountry farmers focused their energies on subsistence-based, diversified agricultural pursuits. These farming families remained largely self-sufficient by raising a wide array of grains, fruits and vegetables, and livestock, and engaging in local networks of barter and exchange for goods or services needed to meet basic household needs.

Shortly after war’s end, however, many upcountry farmers found themselves plunged into debt and progressively drawn into the cultivation of cash crops like cotton and tobacco as they sought credit from local merchants in their attempts to rebuild farms and replenish herds of livestock lost during wartime. Cotton production increased dramatically as merchants demanded that farmers plant cash crops as security for loans of seed and supplies, which, by the 1870s, resulted in a situation of overproduction and falling crop prices. Upcountry farming families often found themselves trapped in a

cycle of debt and dependency that forced them to abandon the diversified farming they had practiced in the past, and which often led to the loss of land ownership. In 1880, at least one-third of the white farmers in the Piedmont South were tenants renting the land on which they worked, by 1900 this proportion would increase to one-half.\textsuperscript{12}

The growth of the post-Civil War southern textile industry was tied to these white southerners who saw in mill work an opportunity for steady employment and economic stability. The Piedmont South lacked a skilled workforce upon which it could build an industrial base. Nevertheless, the vast supply of cheap labor created by these upcountry farmers who were losing money in the cotton market, who sought an outlet for surplus household labor, and who needed waged work to generate additional income, did not need prior experience or training to be unskilled textile mill operatives. Many Piedmont farming families found that their children's labor, particularly that of their daughters, was worth more in a local textile mill than on the land. As one strategy for familial self-sufficiency and as an insulation from debt, poverty, tenancy, and destitution in the emergent postbellum economy, members of these farming families, especially women and children, entered the mills with the intention of earning wages that might keep a farm viable or support a household with “public” work when the land no longer could. For potential industrialists, the establishment of cotton textile mills made sense precisely because they had to find their workforce from among this overwhelmingly rural, unskilled labor pool. This ample supply of labor made possible the rapid development of

the South’s cotton textile industry through the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The transition of poor whites from farms to factories throughout the Piedmont South continued into the 1890s as cotton prices continued to fall and as the organization of textile mills accelerated.\textsuperscript{13}

“Employment must be created for those who are willing and anxious to work, but have no work to do,” Richard Edmonds of the \textit{Manufacturers’ Record} argued. “[T]his can in no way be done to better advantage and with more profitable results to the capitalist who invests his money . . . and to the many people thus furnished with employment,” he continued, “than by building cotton mills.”\textsuperscript{14} Through the 1880s and 1890s local and regional industrial boosters like Edmonds extolled the idea of expanding the South’s cotton textile industry to revitalize local economies, provide a home-market for cotton grown throughout the region, and to offer employment to poor whites. These promoters of the region’s cotton mill campaign touted the construction of textile manufactories as philanthropic endeavors. Bostonian Curtis Guild, Jr. observed that, “Southern labor . . . is good labor, and the scarcity of money makes any employment paid for in cash highly popular. The mill owner in the South is not regarded as an enemy but as a benefactor.”\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Manufacturers’ Record}, vol. 12, no. 1.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Transactions of the New England Cotton Manufacturers’ Association, Annual Meeting}, 1897, 93. Hereafter cited as \textit{NECMA Transactions}.
Part and parcel to the cultivation of the image of southern cotton mill owners as altruists, was the creation and maintenance of a social prescription that made textile mill work an employment option for whites only. These mill owners tapped into many poor whites’ racial fears that the abolition of slavery meant direct competition with free blacks in agriculture and industry, potentially leading to a disruption of traditional patterns of white supremacy. At the same time that the region’s textile manufacturers and cotton mill promoters made maintaining the racial status quo a key element of their booster rhetoric and their cultivation of the image of mill owner as philanthropist, they also attempted to assuage the fears that the creation of a large industrial population would engender class conflict and instability in the region. Manufacturers and boosters argued that mill work would not degrade white factory workers and cultivate class hostilities as has occurred in northern mills, but instead, would be a means through which the region’s “leading citizens” could help the South’s poor whites to reintegrate themselves into the regional economy, facilitate their escape from “degrading” competition with black farm labor, and mitigate class conflict by hiring only white operatives and cultivating common bonds of race between mill owners and their employees. The local and regional press characterized southern cotton mill owners as civic-minded businessmen whose primary motivation was not making profits, but instead, creating a means of gainful employment for dispossessed white farmers through which the southern economy could be rebuilt without creating class antagonisms or undermining the region’s prevailing racial norms.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} Hall, et al., \textit{Like a Family}, 29-31; Woodward, \textit{Origins of the New South}, 133-134, 205-222; McHugh, \textit{Mill Family}, 5-7; Flamming, \textit{Creating the Modern South}, 56-57; Newby, \textit{Plain Folk in the New South}, 436; Broadus Mitchell, \textit{The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South}, 127-132; Mary Oates, \textit{The Role of the Cotton Textile Industry in the Economic Development of the American Southeast: 1900-1940} (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 118-123. A large body of scholarly literature exists that engages with the question of who drove the establishment of cotton mills in the postbellum South. These studies focus on whether or not those who facilitated and funded the construction of cotton mills throughout the region were from a
new class of merchants and professionals or whether they were members of the planter class that had dominated the region through the antebellum period. The crux of this debate focuses on issues of continuity and discontinuity between the antebellum South and the postwar South, and on the question of who controlled the economic development of the "new" South. In The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South (1921), Broadus Mitchell argued that the development of postwar southern cotton mills was a vast regional crusade led by philanthropically-minded men who, while devoted to the industrialization of the region, had strong ties to the region's planter class and antebellum leadership. Wilbur J. Cash in Mind of the South (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1941), challenged the validity of the altruistic motives behind the cotton mill campaign attributed to its leaders by Mitchell, but also argued that there was a continuity between the social and economic leaders of the Old and the New South. For Cash, the building of cotton mills throughout the Piedmont was a "mighty folk movement" that "flowed from the past." C. Vann Woodward offered the first fundamental revision of the Mitchell-Cash continuity argument in Origins of the New South (1951). Woodward rejected the argument that the old members of the planter elite led the New South's industrial development, and asserted that the Civil War fundamentally altered the South's economic development by creating the conditions in which a new middle class that had nominal, if any ties to the antebellum planter elite, could come to the fore. In Woodward's analysis, the leaders of the New South's cotton mill campaign had a fundamentally different economic and social outlook than the planter class. These southerners embraced industrial capitalism and an ethic of individual acquisitiveness that was more ideologically in line with the commercial class in the North than with the agrarian elite in the South. Since the 1970s, numerous historians have engaged in the continuity vs. discontinuity debate and have extended and nuanced the original theses posited by Mitchell, Cash, and Woodward. Dwight Billings in Planters and the Making of a "New South: " Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976) and Jonathan Wiener in Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860-1885 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978) advanced the continuity thesis. Billings found that in North Carolina, planters were largely responsible for the initial development of the state's industrial base so that they could manipulate the growth to their own purposes. Jonathan Wiener contended that in Alabama, planters opposed industrialization at the Civil War's end, but in the face of challenges to their political and economic dominance by Birmingham-based industrialists, they managed to re-exert their control over the economic development of the state by forwarding a message that included industrial development as a key component but through an agenda that would not fundamentally challenge their cultural or economic hegemony. David Carlton in Mill and Town in South Carolina (1982) forwarded a discontinuity argument, enumerating the ways in which a new class of urban merchants, businessmen, and professionals drove the industrial development of South Carolina, while the authors of Like a Family (1987) described how the war fundamentally altered the economic development of the Piedmont South, wherein a new class of business and professional men tied their hopes for personal and regional prosperity to the establishment of cotton textile mills. Gavin Wright, also writing in the discontinuity vein, argued that significant variations existed that belie the use of either continuity or discontinuity to describe every situation of postwar southern economic growth, but that the fundamental transition from slave to free labor forced a gradual "ideological capitulation" among planters toward industrialization regardless of whether or not they drove the New South's economic agenda. On the continuity-discontinuity debate, and challenges to the arguments forwarded by Mitchell, Cash, Woodward, Billings, and Wiener, also see Harold Woodman, "Economic Reconstruction and the Rise of the New South, 1865-1900," in John Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Stanford Higginbotham (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 254-307; John Beck, "Building the New South: A Revolution from Above in a Piedmont County" Journal of Southern History 53(August 1987): 441-470; Bess Beatty, "Lowells of the South: Northern Influences on the Nineteenth-Century North Carolina Textile Industry" Journal of Southern History 53(February 1987): 37-62; Robert Eugene Perry, "Middle-Class Townsmen and Northern Capital: The Rise of the Alabama Cotton Textile Industry, 1865-1900" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1986); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Broadus Mitchell: Economic Historian of the South," Bruce Clayton, "W. J. Cash: A Native Son Confronts the Past," and John Herbert Roper, "C. Vann Woodward, Southern Historian," in Glenn Feldman, ed., Reading Southern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001), 25-31, 112-122, and 134-150.
Through their public pronouncements, the southern press and industrial boosters were essential in generating interest, support, and excitement for the construction of cotton mills, the establishment of an industrial base, and the creation of jobs for poor whites throughout the region. “The wide-awake, progressive people of the South are fast realizing that the prosperity of Southern cities depends on manufactures,” announced the Manufacturers’ Record, “They see wherever manufactures flourish all branches of trade are prosperous.” These promoters also broadcast to industrialists throughout the country the South’s intention to become the leading manufacturing region in the United States. “The war destroyed the capital and property of the South . . . and left in its wake a grinding poverty, not understandable except by those whose fate it was to have passed through it,” argued North Carolinian T. C. Guthrie, “[I]t is not surprising that it has developed men of strong characters; it is not surprising that it has developed men of ability, and it is not surprising that more or less of them saw the grand opportunity in the manufacture of cotton.” Men like Guthrie were integral in the creation of an image of a phoenix-like New South rising from the ashes of the old that was meant for northern audiences as much as for southern ones. Booster rhetoric suggested that the South had seen the error of its ways, was now led by men with an outlook fundamentally different from those of the old planter elite, and was ready to embrace an economic plan based on industrialization and diversified agriculture. According to southern booster D. A. Tompkins, those who clung to “the idea that for a Southern man there is no occupation

17 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 10, no. 3.
18 SCSA Proceedings, 1903, 45-46.
but raising cotton with negro labor,” would be destined to “grow poorer day by day . . . until the most tenacious of them pass out of life.”

Through the 1880s and into the 1890s, these boosters opined that this New South would use the textile industry as an instrument through which the region would return to a dominant position in the economy of the United States. “We have served notice that the South is not only to be the source of the world’s best cotton supply, but that it must wear the double crown of cotton production and cotton manufacture,” noted one southerner in 1895, “We are in this race for every prize that can be won.” Southern industrial spokesmen crafted a message that both threatened and enticed New England textile manufacturers. In doing so, they laid down a gauntlet for them. On one hand, the boosters aggressively advertised the region’s manufacturing “advantages” and emphasized the fact that these would surely undermine New England’s textile manufacturing dominance. “The enormous increase in the number of spindles in the Southern States . . . is positively alarming,” contended Richard Edmonds, “the natural advantages of the South for the manufacture of cotton are go great as compared with the Northeast . . . many of the mills in the later district will have to shut down permanently.” But, on the other hand, southern industrial promoters also made clear that they welcomed the investment of northern capital in the development of the cotton manufacturing industry below the Mason-Dixon Line. “Nothing can prevent her

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20 NECMA Transactions, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1895, 69.

21 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 5, no. 21.
growth,” the booster press asserted, “but it is for the North alone to determine what share or part she will take in Southern development.”

New Englanders’ first comprehensive introduction to the progress of the South’s textile industry, its likelihood of future growth, and the potential for profitable production in the region, came in 1881 at the Atlanta International Cotton Exposition. Intended to showcase the region’s postwar agricultural and industrial prowess, the exposition proved itself a vehicle through which prospective northern textile investors saw for themselves the opportunities open to entrepreneurs who invested their money in southern manufactories. The exposition also provided a platform to demonstrate that southern-made textile goods were of a quality that could compete successfully in the marketplace with those produced in New England. “I am willing to say here that I have been compelled to change my views very materially on the chance of the Southern manufacturer being rather more of a competitor than we are anxious to have,” reported one member of the New England Cotton Manufacturers’ Association upon his return from the exposition. Although expressing his optimism that “there is room enough” in existing markets for the output from New England and the newly established southern mills, the NECMA delegate cautioned that “It is from such mills at such points that we may expect competition on coarse goods, and at a very early day.” The New England industry press observed that the textile mills operating in the Piedmont South “have proven very profitable,” and noted that “it is wise for us to take advantage of the new conditions.”

22 *Manufacturers’ Record*, vol. 10, no. 8.
24 *Commercial Bulletin*, 20 August 1881. Historians have noted that the 1881 exposition was an important factor in the timing of the acceleration of the South’s cotton textile industry growth during the
Southern industrial boosters continued to work through the press and additional expositions to advertise the region’s economic progress and attract the attention of potential northern textile industry investors. In 1895, the Manufacturers’ Record published a special supplement to its paper to promote the advantages of the South with the intention of sending a copy of the report to “each director of every cotton mill in New England.” Southern manufacturers and their supporters in the region’s press stressed to would-be investors the importance of location as one of the key advantages in the manufacture of cotton textiles in the Piedmont South. Industrial promoters forwarded the argument that making cotton goods in the South cost less than in the Northeast because of the region’s warm climate, which translated into lower expenditures on heat, and due to superior water and local coal resources that meant substantial savings on the costs of powering a manufactory’s machinery.

The boosters, likewise, emphasized that it was only logical to establish textile mills in the region where the raw cotton was grown, and made “bring the cotton mills to the cotton fields” a rallying cry of the South’s industrialization campaign. “Cotton goods for Northern mills having to pass through so many hands and be sent over long lines of railroads, makes the raw material expensive before it reaches the spindles,” Richard Edmonds noted, “which makes a great difference in the cost of manufacturing goods.” In reality, however, the advantages of the proximity of cotton to the mills and lower fuel costs were largely canceled out by the fact that the products of southern mills had to be

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26 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 27, no. 4.

27 Ibid., vol. 5, no. 4.
shipped for finishing in northern bleacheries and dyeworks and for sale through New
York and Boston selling agents. Rhetorically, nonetheless, southern boosters created an
image that it was inherently “natural,” by virtue of location, resources, and climate, for
cotton goods to be manufactured in the South and inevitable that the region would
supplant the textile production in New England where such endowments were lacking.

Southern industrial promoters, by far, paid the most attention to advertising the
attributes of the region’s labor pool. Boosters characterized southern labor as cheap,
docile, and native. According to the regional spokespersons, this triumvirate was the
biggest manufacturing advantage that the South had over New England. “Of the
advantages of the South . . . it is almost needless to speak. Probably the most important
consideration in the estimation of mill men is the labor,” argued Richard Edmonds to the
members of the New England Cotton Manufacturers’ Association. “The South has an
abundant supply of the very best help from which to secure its operatives,” he continued,
“. . . and as a class are anxious to find work and willing to accept much lower wages than
northern operatives are compelled to have in order to live.” After the expense of raw
cotton, labor costs were the single largest expenditure in the manufacture of textile goods,
constituting an estimated one-quarter of production costs. The lower wages paid to
southern mill hands, therefore, was not only a significant advantage to southern
industrialists trying to compete with established New England firms but was also an
extremely attractive selling point for those attempting to lure northern investments.

28 Galenson, The Migration of the Cotton Textile Industry from New England to the South, 23,
156-158; Kane, Textiles in Transition, 9; David Doane, “Regional Cost Differentials and Textile Location:
A Statistical Analysis” Explorations in Economic History 9(Fall 1971), 4, 12-20.
29 NECMA Proceedings, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1895, 199.
30 Galenson, The Migration of the Cotton Textile Industry from New England to the South, 23;
Oates, The Role of the Cotton Textile Industry in the Economic Development of the American Southeast,
115.
In the northeast, textile manufacturers had to pay their operatives more than those in the South because of the availability of other industrial employment in the region. While textile workers remained among the lowest paid workers in New England through the turn of the century, their wages were forty to fifty percent higher than southern operatives whose opportunities for waged factory work were extremely limited. Southern manufacturers and the booster press argued that it was possible to pay low wages to southern operatives because of the lower costs of southern living, especially in the areas of fuel and housing due to the region's more mild climate, and because of the lower skill and productivity levels of the southern mill hands who had been recently recruited into the industrial workforce. The effect of warmer weather and skill on the wages paid to southern mill hands, however, paled in comparison to the consequences of the limited economic diversification of the region.

As the southern cotton mill campaign continued through the 1880s and early 1890s, the wages paid to southern textile mill operatives remained closely linked to the abundance of surplus agricultural labor and the prevailing low-levels of pay for those who continued to work the land. The textile industry in the Piedmont South did not prove to be the engine for diversified development and overall economic growth that many New South boosters had predicted. As late as 1900, only six percent of the southern labor workforce was employed in manufacturing establishments. Piedmont mill owners did not use their textile dividends to fund alternative industrial pursuits but, instead, largely reinvested them into cotton textile production, which had proven itself a moneymaker. Without the widespread presence of industries in the region, especially ones employing skilled workers, there was little competition for workers from among the
existing labor pool and nothing to force an increase in the wages paid to textile mill hands. The South’s economy continued to rely on staple crop cultivation and the production of raw materials into simple manufactured goods, like coarse cotton textiles, which worked to keep wages low.\textsuperscript{31}

Although mill owners could have employed black operatives at an even lower cost than whites, the majority of southern industrialists did not deviate from the regional norm dictating that only white labor would be employed in manufacturing positions in the South’s cotton mills. Yet, these mill owners were influenced by more than the booster rhetoric that characterized the textile industry as an economic haven for the South’s poor whites. Antebellum southern mill owners usually used white labor in their mills because it was cheaper to employ than buying a slave workforce. This hiring practice often simply shifted to mills that operated after the war as transformations in the economy of the countryside created a large pool of cheap, white labor. Mill owners and mill hands alike, moreover, embraced the southern social prescriptions which dictated that white women and girls, who constituted a majority of the region’s textile workforce during the late nineteenth century, could not be employed in the same rooms as black men.\textsuperscript{32}

Racial prejudices and assumptions about the capabilities of white and black workers to perform certain kinds of jobs also played a determining factor in the patterns


of postwar textile mill employment. "I do not think that the negro will ever be able to
work in cotton mills, because . . . he has not the intelligence," argued one Alabama mill
superintendent, "I use them around the yard and driving the teams, and for this they are
well qualified as they have more physical strength than a white man and can do more
manual work." Another southern manufacturer opined, "the cotton mills of the South
must depend entirely on intelligent, skilled, and well-paid white labor for their future
prosperity" because "the negro is a natural farmer and in no sense qualified for the
exactions of tending the loom or spinning frame." Even during times, like in the late
1890s and into the first years of the twentieth century, when cotton prices increased and
white labor became more difficult to secure, southern textile manufacturers did little
more than engage in discussions about the possibility of introducing black labor into their
factories. Individual mill owners hired black workers as custodians and to load and
unload goods in the mill yards and warehouses, but they recognized that the likelihood of
conflict between themselves and their white mill hands should they breach the norm of
only employing white operatives, meant that any meaningful employment of black
workers in the southern textile industry would remain an improbability.

Cheap, plentiful, white labor was not the only foundation upon which southern
textile manufacturers built their mills nor the only labor-related selling point used by the

33 Manufacturers' Record, vol. 24, no. 7; Southern and Western Textile Excelsior, 2 February 1901.
34 The Manufacturers' Record conducted a survey in 1893 on the feasibility of employing black
labor in southern textile mills. The majority of the respondents acknowledged that the fundamental issue
preventing them from tapping into this additional workforce was the fact that their white operatives would
not work in an integrated factory setting. For detailed analyses of black labor and the development of the
late nineteenth-century southern textile industry, see Stokes, "Black and White Labor in the Development
of the Southern Textile Industry, 1880-1920;" Newby, Plain Folk in the New South, 462-492; Janiewski,
Sisterhood Denied, and "Southern Honor, Southern Dishonor: Managerial Ideology and the Construction of
Gender, Race and Class Relations in Southern Industry," in Ava Baron, ed., Work Engendered: Toward a

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region’s boosters to attract northern investments to the Piedmont. Industrial promoters also characterized this workforce as “docile” and “tractable.” In their portrayals, the men, women, and children who flocked to the southern textile mills were members of impoverished farming families who were happy to have waged work of any kind and for the pay and housing their altruistic employers offered to them. They were simple, hardworking folk who, despite their rural background, could be quickly trained into a capable industrial workforce. “They are the healthiest and happiest lot of operatives that I have ever seen, and, they go singing to their work,” Richard Edmonds quoted a New Yorker as saying, “When I saw this I asked myself what chance a New England mill would have in competition with an institution having such advantages.”35 Relations between labor and capital in the South, industrial spokespersons argued, were not beset by the conflicts and tensions found in other industrialized regions. They contended that because southern operatives were “contented in their work and pay,” the conditions in which labor unionism flourished in other parts of the country were nonexistent. “The operatives are docile and obedient so long as they are well treated,” a member of the southern trade press noted, “They may be compared to a proud, mettlesome, and prancing young horse, who if rightly trained and treated kindly will prove a valuable and useful burden bearer.”36

35 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 20, no. 16.
36 Ibid., vol. 9, no. 14; Southern and Western Textile Excelsior, 12 November 1898. Through the 1960s, with the exception of George Mitchell’s Textile Unionism and the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), historians of the southern textile industry reflected such late nineteenth-century “docility” booster rhetoric in their characterizations of the region’s mill hands, by arguing that this docility was a key factor that prevented the establishment of unions in the region. Beginning in the 1970s, however, historians created a more accurate picture of the late nineteenth-century southern textile workforce and have shown how the portrayals of these operatives made by southern industrial promoters did not always mesh with reality. For examples of analyses that debunk this booster-created docility myth, see Melton Alonza McLaurin, Paternalism and Protest, and The Knights of Labor in the South (Westport,
Southern boosters also gave an inordinate amount of press to the fact that the region’s labor pool consisted of non-immigrant workers, emphasizing this as a boon for would-be northern investors seeking harmonious relations with their employees. In addition to the arguments that commonalities of race, the philanthropic intentions of mill owners, and the acceptance of any kind of waged work by members of poverty-stricken farming families mitigated any possibility of labor-capital conflicts, industrial promoters stressed that peaceful relations between employer and employees existed because southern manufacturers drew their workforce from independent, Anglo-Saxon, yeomen families. Southern boosters contended that New England textile operatives were primarily immigrants and children of immigrants who, by virtue of their ethnicity, were more prone to instigate conflict with management and strike than were these native-born southern operatives who descended from “superior stock.” Richard Edmonds noted in 1889, “No one thing is of greater moment in the progress of the South than the fact that all labor is native labor.” A southern manufacturer echoed Edmonds’ sentiments over a decade later, adding, “our people are, as a class, native born, proverbially religious, having an inborn inclination to be loyal to their employer, honest and capable.” He predicted that “as long as our mills are filled with our own native-born employees, just so long will we be free from labor disturbances.” New England textile manufacturers, increasingly beset by labor-management strife during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, paid particular attention to this message that southern manufacturers were free from class conflict because of the native-born labor pool from which they drew their workers. “[I]n

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CT: Greenwood Press, 1978); Carlton, Mill and Town in South Carolina; Hall, et al., Like a Family; Newby, Plain Folk in the New South.

37 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 15, no. 25.
38 SCSA Proceedings, 1903, 151-152.
marked contrast to that of the heterogeneous foreign horde which fills the spinning and weave rooms of the Northern mill,” the New England industry press noted, southern millhands were “of native American stock, hardy from generations of hill and mountain life. . . . The labor agitator is distinctly frowned upon and the independent character of the help is not favorable to the trade union idea.”

Although New Englanders’ received a steady stream of information from industrial boosters about the manufacturing advantages to be had in the Piedmont South and the significant competitive threat posed by these southern mills, their reactions to the southerners’ claims fell along a wide spectrum. Their responses ranged from outright denials that the South could successfully produce cotton textiles let alone challenge New England’s supremacy in the industry, to acceptance of the fact that southern competition was real and an actuality that must be taken seriously. “I think the greatest competition that exists between New England and the South is rather in the newspaper than in the mill,” one manufacturer asserted to members of the New England Cotton Manufacturers’ Association, “I really do not think there is any competition—any serious competition.” The Boston Advertiser, however, took a much more pessimistic view, noting that in the South, “conditions are exceptionally favorable for the manufacture of cotton goods,” creating a situation in which “The North cannot hold out long against Southern competition.”

Most New England manufacturers, nonetheless, rejected such optimistic and pessimistic extremes and instead ascribed to the position that southern competition was a reality but that the South would never undermine New England’s textile preeminence. “The change, if it comes, will come slowly,” argued one New Englaner.

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40 NECMA Transactions, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1898, 165; Boston Advertiser quoted in Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 23, no. 16.
A. M. Gooddale of the New England Cotton Manufacturers’ Association concurred, admitting that southern “advantages are numerous,” but that “we of New England will still stay in business.” Yet, even as New England and southern textile manufacturers addressed one another in a spirit of friendly competition, a North-South war of words continued into the turn of the century among these industrialists, regional trade newspapers, and southern boosters over whether or not the South was destined to put an end to New England’s reign over the American cotton textile industry.

The center of the cotton textile manufacturing industry in the United States remained firmly entrenched in New England through the 1880s and 1890s in spite of the impressive expansion of the industry in North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. The numbers of spindles in the Piedmont South increased from slightly over 32,000 in 1870 to over four million by 1900, and the number of southern mill hands grew nearly ten-fold during the same time period. Throughout the South, however, textile mills remained smaller than their New England counterparts and little vertical integration between the manufacturing and finishing of the products made there occurred. The output of the majority of southern mills remained too limited to support on-site finishing facilities and these goods continued to be sent to northern finishing plants, bleacheries,

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41 NECMA Transactions, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1895, 72.
42 In Independence and Empire, Patrick Hearden interpreted the southern cotton mill campaign and public pronouncements of northern and southern textile manufacturers about the potential for southern dominance in the textile industry as fueled by lingering Civil War sectional rivalries. Hearden asserts that southern boosters and industrialists shifted the sectional conflict that had occurred on battlefields during wartime into the realms of economics and politics during peacetime. For alternative views of the importance of sectional rivalry in shaping the development of the postwar southern textile industry, see Gaston, The New South Creed; Bess Beatty, “Lowells of the South,” 51-61.
43 Mitchell, The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South, 245. Contemporary sources, which usually included estimates of mills planned and under construction, however, place the 1900 southern figure at a much higher six million spindles. See NECMA Transactions, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1900, 189-190; Southern and Western Textile Excelsior, 27 October 1900.
and dyeworks for final processing well into the 1900s. The reality for New England textile manufacturers, nonetheless, was that southern cotton textile production was growing in leaps and bounds and had begun to be a significant presence in the domestic and foreign marketplaces. By the depression years of 1890s, many New England textile manufacturers, like those at the Dwight Manufacturing Company in Chicopee, Massachusetts, observed the impact that southern competition had on their profits and started looking for ways to effectively counteract the manufacturing advantages to be had by those producing textiles below the Mason-Dixon Line.

CHAPTER II

“MANUFACTURERS SURELY CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE BUSINESS:” LABOR, LEGISLATION, AND DEPRESSION

“For some days the newspapers have been filled with accounts of the investments of large sums of money in the far South by the great cotton mill corporations of New England. . . . And thus the States of the South . . . will soon witness the greatest activity in cotton milling ever known in the history of this country,” wrote Carter Glass, owner and editor of the *Lynchburg News* in 1895. “They said their object in coming South is to get away from the meddlesome and restrictive laws enacted at the instigation of ‘walking delegates’ and lazy agitators. Their hope is to get among conservative people who want work and so [do] not hamper and hinder great enterprises.”

Glass’s short editorial boiled down two of the motives behind capital flight in the Massachusetts textile industry at the turn of the century: organized labor in the mills and “restrictive laws,” often passed at the behest of unionized operatives, which regulated working hours, employee ages and education standards, and workplace safety conditions. In 1880, Massachusetts cotton manufacturers looked forward, optimistically, to a long and lucrative future for their New England mills. But, as southern competition in the industry became a force with which to reckon during the depression of the 1890s, Massachusetts mill owners perceived themselves as besieged by burdensome and unfair labor laws and regulations. Organized labor in Massachusetts praised pro-reform state politicians for “being fittingly concerned

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1 *Lynchburg News*, 18 January 1895.
with the needs of our factory people” and the ongoing attention paid to regulatory legislation. Massachusetts textile manufacturers, however, blasted the state’s system of labor laws, saying that it drove textile investments out of the state, and that industrialists were “driven to the wall by the hampering restrictions imposed by the Legislature at the behest of labor demagogues.” Ultimately, Massachusetts public policy as well as conflict between textile manufacturers and organized labor, would be key factors in the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s decision to build a cotton textile mill in the Piedmont South.

Massachusetts was one of the nation’s first industrialized states, and as such, it was also a leader in enacting legislation that regulated working hours, employee ages, and factory safety conditions. As early as the 1820s, organized workers in Massachusetts spearheaded efforts to convince members of the Commonwealth’s legislature to pass labor laws. Thus, as Massachusetts labor unions grew and matured, so too did the state’s regulatory legislation. Massachusetts labor laws did not apply to all wage earners in the state equally, and compliance with regulatory statutes varied from place to place and industry to industry. Nevertheless, by the turn of the century, the Bay State arguably had the most rigorous and detailed system of industrial legislation and enforcement of any state in the nation.

Agitation for regulatory legislation began in Massachusetts in the 1820s, and until the passage of the state’s 1874 ten-hour law, the chief interest in workplace reform focused on the regulation of hours of labor for children and adults. In 1825, Boston artisans attempted to secure for themselves the ten-hour day. Also spurred on by calls from workingmen’s groups to regulate the employment of children, the Massachusetts

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2 Labor Leader, 19 March 1887; Commercial Bulletin, 19 January 1895.

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Senate launched an investigation into child labor in the states' manufacturing industries in order to determine how many children were employed, what their hours of labor were, and how work affected their ability to attend school. The Senate investigation found that there were large numbers of children employed in the state, overwhelmingly in the textile industry, and that they worked from sunup to sunset. Although the inquiry led members of the investigating committee to the conclusion that working such long hours from a very young age was not conducive to nor did it allow the majority of factory children to get an education, the committee did not recommend legislative action as a solution. For another decade, calls for hours and ages legislation continued to be sounded by organized workers throughout the state.⁴

The General Assembly of Massachusetts revisited the issues of child labor, working hours, and education in 1836, when the Committee on Education in the House of Representatives conducted another study of child labor and education. The report issued at the conclusion of the investigation argued that because of the rapidly changing nature of employment in Massachusetts from agricultural to industrial labor, it became, "the solemn and indispensable duty of the representatives of the people to provide . . . that those institutions which have given New England her peculiar character for general

intelligence and virtue be not changed with the changing employment of her people.”

The members of the committee attached a bill to their report requiring that, under penalty of a fifty dollar fine, no child under fourteen years old could be employed in a manufacturing establishment without attending school for at least three months of the preceding year so that “no class be allowed to remain uneducated.” During the 1836 legislative session though, the child labor bill passed in amended form, raising the proposed age requirement to fifteen years. The 1836 law did not include any enforcement mechanisms. In 1838, the legislature would add a provision to this 1836 statute releasing employers from liability if they could show that they were provided with a sworn certificate of school attendance. The 1836 law, described as “faulty, hastily constructed, and unenforceable as placed upon the statute books . . . intended to still the clamor of labor agitators” was, nevertheless, the first labor law passed in Massachusetts.

Despite the calls for state action on the matter of restricting working hours, the 1836 child employment and education law did not address the hours issue as it related to children or adults. By the 1840s, however, the largest segment of industrial workers in Massachusetts were operatives employed in the state’s textile industry, and they became the most vocal proponents of the limitation of working hours by state law. Workers in Massachusetts textile mill centers, a majority of whom were women, engaged in sporadic turnouts during the 1820s and 1830s to protest increased workloads and the speeding-up of machinery. Yet, these demonstrations of worker solidarity failed to wrest concessions

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5 Ibid., 18-19.
6 Whittelsey, Massachusetts Labor Legislation, 9; Persons, “The Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts,” 17-19. The 1836 law was amended in 1855, omitting the 1838 school certificate provision, and again in 1858, increasing the school requirement to eighteen weeks.
from employers regarding working conditions and hours, and led textile operatives to seek state legislated relief. Throughout the 1840s, mill workers from large and small textile towns throughout the state sent petitions to the Massachusetts legislature calling for a law limiting the working hours in the state’s mills to ten per day. “Unable to halt what they perceived as the degradation of work,” observed historian Thomas Dublin, “operatives sought at least to mitigate its ill effects by limiting the hours of labor.”

The first formal legislative action on the issue of hours regulation for Massachusetts manufactories occurred in 1842. In response to increased agitation from textile centers on the issue of hours limitation, and to a petition received from Fall River operatives calling for more stringent regulations concerning the employment of children, the state legislature added an hours amendment to the 1836 child employment and education law. The modification attached a provision to the 1836 statute making illegal the employment of children under twelve years old in manufacturing establishments for more than ten hours a day. Bay State industrial workers, however, continued to rally around the cause of securing a universal ten-hour day for factory operatives regardless of age. Reacting to the thousands of signatures on “ten hour petitions” received by state representatives, the Massachusetts legislature appointed a committee in 1845 to collect evidence relating to the issue of reducing hours for adults.

In their testimony before the 1845 hours committee, mill hands from throughout Massachusetts told of the conditions of work and the quality of life for those laboring in

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the textile industry, noting the ill-effects, both physical and intellectual, of working eleven to thirteen hours a day in dimly lit, poorly ventilated mills. A group of Lowell petitioners declared to the hours committee that mill work was taking them “through pain, disease and privation, down to a premature grave,” while an employee of the Boott Mills attributed her “ill health to the long hours of labor, the shortness of time for meals, and the bad air of the mills.” Members of the legislative committee visited several textile mill towns in the Commonwealth, observing at each the environment to be found there and hearing input from mill managers on the hours issue. Upon the conclusion of its investigation, the committee argued that regulatory legislation was not warranted as the inquiry revealed no evidence to convince the committee members that operatives’ working conditions harmed either their health or their “morals.” The committee determined that mill operatives were capable of making their own bargains with their employers and should, therefore, seek redress of their grievances not from the state, but from those for whom they worked.

A committee convened the following year to reinvestigate the ten-hour issue admitted that a “problem” existed but that the remedy was not to be had through state intervention. The committee asserted that it was neither fair nor within the bounds of the legislature’s authority to regulate the workday for factory operatives but not for all who labored, especially those in agriculture, throughout the state. Foreshadowing arguments that would be used by textile manufacturers in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, members of the 1846 committee also noted that the result of passing a ten-hour law applicable to Massachusetts factories in advance of any other state would unduly burden textile

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concerns trying to compete with mills elsewhere. In the wake of the 1845 and 1846 investigations, it would be nearly two decades until Massachusetts legislators would pass meaningful hours restriction legislation.10

The ten-hour movement and agitation for state mandated workplace reforms continued through the 1850s but came of age during and after the Civil War. Discussions over hours and child labor continued among members of labor organizations throughout Massachusetts during the early 1860s. These workers found new allies in the anti-slavery ranks and discovered a common cause with the Commonwealth’s Radical Republicans. Throughout the war, anti-slavery advocates and Radical Republicans became increasingly vocal about the state’s responsibility to guarantee individual equality before the law, while labor organizations stressed the importance of considering individual equality and economic inequality together, and the implications of this relationship not only for workers but also for a free, democratic society as a whole. Radical Republicans and labor in Massachusetts, moreover, both embraced the notion that it was the duty of the government to mediate between competing interests in society and use its authority to ensure the common good. This conception of the state, coupled with labor’s insistence that the state act as a conduit for economic equality, fueled the passage of regulatory legislation in Massachusetts as Radical Republicans in the state legislature sought to

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10 Dublin, Women at Work, 108-131, especially 113-116; Persons, “The Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts,” 27-50, especially 42-50. According to Persons, the groups spearheading the Ten Hour Movement from 1844-1846, in addition to local organizations of textile operatives from Fall River and Waltham, were the New England Workingmen’s Association, the Lowell Mechanics and Laborers Association that included Lowell “factory girls,” and the Female Labor Reform Association, renamed the New England Labor Reform League in 1846.
mediate between capital and labor by adjusting and protecting the interests of individual workers with those of "collected capital."\textsuperscript{11}

The first post-Civil War regulatory law in Massachusetts was a new child employment and education act. A majority of representatives of both political parties in the Massachusetts legislature hesitated to support labor's calls for state mandated hours regulation for adult workers through the 1860s, but Republican reformers did champion the cause of child labor restriction and more stringent education requirements. Arguing that the future good of the Commonwealth depended on protecting the health and facilitating the intellectual development of children, the legislature enacted a law in 1867 applicable to manufacturing and mechanical establishments that outlawed the employment of children under ten years old, required that children ages ten to fifteen years attend school at least three months in the year prior to employment if having lived within the state during the preceding six months, and restricted the employment of children under fifteen years old to sixty hours per week. Violators of the law faced a fine of fifty dollars. Unlike the virtually useless 1832 law, the 1867 statute did include enforcement provisions. Yet, the 1867 law was also largely ineffective. Only one state-appointed deputy was responsible for factory inspection and enforcement of the child labor statutes and, according to the wording of the act, penalties could only be levied against those who "knowingly" employed persons covered by the law.\textsuperscript{12}

The 1867 law, however, set two important precedents for proponents of regulatory labor legislation in the United States: the right of the state to establish age, education, and health standards for children in the workplace and the right of the state to enforce such standards.


\textsuperscript{12} Persons, "The Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts," 93-97; Montgomery, Beyond Equality, 293-294.
hours, and education requirements for manufacturers hiring children, and to create and manage an enforcement mechanism to ensure compliance with regulatory statutes. By the turn of the century, additions to the Massachusetts child labor act outlawed the employment of youths under the age of fourteen years in factories, workshops, and mercantile establishments; mandated thirty-weeks of school attendance each year for employees fourteen to sixteen years old; required school certificates, as evidence of compliance with the education requirement, and age certificates filed with an employer for all workers under sixteen years old; required proof of literacy for all one-year residents of the state, ages fourteen to sixteen, and evidence of regular day or evening school attendance for those deemed unable to read or write simple English. Enforcement of the law rested with a team of ten state factory inspectors and local truant officers. Employers violating any stipulation of the child employment and education laws and parents who falsified age or school certificates faced fifty dollar fines. The passage of the 1867 child employment and education act met with little resistance from owners of Massachusetts manufactories because of the loophole provided by the inclusion of the word “knowingly” in the penalty clause. For the state to set maximum hours for children with little possibility of meaningful enforcement was one thing, to enact a compulsory law for adults was quite another.

According to Massachusetts businessman Edward Atkinson, state mandated hours limitations would take from adult operatives “the right to dispose freely of the only thing they have to sell, that is to say, their time.” The movement to establish a maximum

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13 For a complete list of Massachusetts statutes relating to child employment and education from 1838-1898, see Whittelsey, Massachusetts Labor Legislation, 107-111.
14 Testimony of Edward Atkinson before the joint Special Committee of the Massachusetts Legislature, Upon the Hours of Labor, 1871, quoted in Persons, “The Early History of Factory Legislation
workweek for adults faced a great deal of opposition, especially from textile interests throughout the Bay State. The ten-hour day and sixty-hour workweek was an unofficial standard for carpenters, masons, and craftsmen throughout Massachusetts, but operatives in the textile industry continued to work an average of twelve hours a day, six days a week. The Massachusetts legislature considered the question of shorter hours in 1865 and again in 1866 as workers throughout the state, especially those affiliated with the Boston Trades Union, began agitating for the eight-hour day. An investigatory commission named by Governor John Andrews in 1865 to study the issue of hours regulation came to the conclusion that legislation on the matter was neither warranted nor wise. The commission appointed to study the matter agreed in its 1866 report that the long hours and poor working conditions found principally throughout the state’s textile mills did merit concern but, because universal hours restriction would interfere with freedom of contract and because hours provisions would not be law outside of Massachusetts, the overall welfare of communities with manufacturing establishments would be hurt more than helped by the enactment of hours restrictions. The failure of the eight-hour movement, however, reenergized the movement for the establishment of the ten-hour day in textile centers throughout Massachusetts during the late 1860s.\textsuperscript{15}

Textile workers organized into craft-based unions led this revived movement for labor legislation. These textile workers were overwhelmingly male and came mostly from the ranks of mulespinners, loomfixers, and weavers. Mulespinners and loomfixers were typically the highest paid, most skilled, and best organized segments of the textile

labor force by virtue of their skills and because mulespinners and loomfixers controlled access to their trades by deciding who would or would not be taught the crafts. Weavers were semi-skilled operatives and the only organized trade with a large number of women in the line of work. They gained their on the job power not through their skills per se, but through their numbers. Weavers usually constituted one-third of the workforce of a cotton textile mill. By removing themselves from the production process, weavers could effectively shutdown an entire mill.  

The craft system of organization limited the numbers of workers who were official members of textile unions during the late nineteenth century. Despite rare moments of mill-wide collective actions during times of industrial strife, craft solidarity and the largely male constituency of the weavers’ unions, limited formal organization of unskilled workers, immigrants and women, as well as the economic benefits and autonomy mill hands with a union affiliation could demand from their employers. Yet these textile unions provided the leaders and the organizational backing necessary to make known to Massachusetts politicians the need for shorter hours and better working conditions in mills throughout the state. The lobbying activities of textile union members, especially mulespinners in Lowell, Fall River, Taunton, Holyoke, and Chicopee, were fundamental in the securing of state mandated industrial regulations and in setting standards for factory safety, touching skilled and unskilled alike throughout the Massachusetts textile industry.  

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17 This interpretation differs significantly from the argument made by textile union historian Cletus Daniel, who asserted that craft based unions in New England textile centers “provided only temporary advantages to skilled workers and nothing at all to the growing number of machine operatives whose lack of skills rendered them ineligible for membership.” See Daniel, Culture of Misfortune: An Interpretive History of Textile Unionism in the United States (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 14-15.
Organized textile labor in Massachusetts embraced political action as one of the most effective ways to improve workplace conditions throughout the 1870s, lobbying in the legislature and using their votes as the means of achieving this end. As they made use of strikes to challenge management’s economic power in the mills, skilled male textile workers rallied around the ten-hour issue, using the ballot and group pressure tactics to elect labor-friendly politicians and challenge mill owners’ political power at the statehouse. Organized textile labor, however, shifted its objective from ten-hour legislation for all Bay State manufacturing workers to one calling for the state regulation of working hours for women and children only. Knowing that a majority of politicians in the Massachusetts legislature objected to any use of state action that would infringe on an individual’s freedom of contract, male textile operatives crafted a persuasive message that the state had not only a right, but a duty, to protect those, like the women and children facing physical and social degradation by working long hours in textile mills, who could not protect themselves. Ignoring the activism of female operatives who had been integral in short-hour movements since the 1830s, male operatives pointed to the fact that women and children could not effectively participate in the political process or make their needs known through the vote and, therefore, were dependent on men to do it for them. For many legislators on Beacon Hill, the dependency argument was one they could support without betraying their belief in a man’s right to sell or buy labor as he saw fit. The lobbying textile operatives, meanwhile, well understood that even by changing their focus to women and children only, the effect of any hours legislation would essentially be the same. Because of the preponderance of women and young people working in the textile industry, no mills could function without them. Any law regulating
their working hours would by necessity, operatives and manufacturers alike realized, extend to all textile mill employees.\textsuperscript{18}

Massachusetts textile union members focused on three points to forward their case as to why the state should limit the hours of labor in textile mills. The first argument focused on the impact that the environment found in the mills had on workers. Laboring eleven, twelve, and thirteen hours a day in crowded, noisy, hot, poorly ventilated rooms, the unionists and allies they found in the medical profession reasoned, damaged the health of mill operatives, especially of women and children who were by their nature, physically more vulnerable to these conditions than men. The ten-hour law was, therefore, not about the state regulating the individual’s right of contract, it was about protecting the health and welfare of the Commonwealth’s weakest members. The effect of long hours of work on women “exhausts their vitality and destroys their womanhood almost, from the very conditions of labor and the . . . unsanitary conditions under which it is performed,” argued long-time Massachusetts labor reformer Frank Foster, “as long as that condition of things exists and the hours of labor remain as they are . . . there is a

\textsuperscript{18} M. F. Dickinson, Jr., Shall We Legislate Upon the Hours of Labor?, Argument of M. F. Dickinson Before the Joint Special Committee of the Massachusetts Legislature, Upon the Hours of Labor in Behalf of the Remonstrant, 15 March 1871 (Boston: J. B. Batcheleder, 1871), 4; Persons, “The Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts,” 116-118; Mary Blewett, Constant Turmoil: The Politics of Industrial Life in Nineteenth-Century New England (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 102-140, especially 102-104. Blewett places the post-Civil War agitation for the ten-hour day within the context of definitions of masculinity held by native-born and British skilled male textile operatives who worked in Fall River. According to Blewett, the gendering of the ten-hour agitation undermined the possibility of a strong labor movement in the New England textile industry because skilled male operatives distanced themselves from all those who they saw as “dependent,” fracturing the textile workforce along gender and ethnic lines. By undercutting labor solidarity with other textile operatives, these skilled, male workers damaged their own organizational strength, as they constituted a smaller and smaller proportion of the textile workforce from the 1890s forward. For an overview of the gendering of protective legislation from the Civil War to World War I, see Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 180-214.
growing element of danger in our social condition.”¹⁹ Because women gave birth to and children were the next generation of Massachusetts citizens, safeguarding them meant safeguarding the future of society itself.

Textile unionists bolstered their hours restriction argument by also contending that shortening the workday would make all mill hands better, more productive employees. They pointed to the fact that since the 1830s and 1840s, the machinery used throughout the textile industry had undergone significant labor-saving improvements with a corresponding increase in the amount of goods that could be produced within a single workday. But, according to the unionists, manufacturers lost the potential profits that should have come with this increase in production because by the eleventh hour of work, operatives were so tired that they made frequent mistakes and a preponderance of irregular, unsellable goods. “The confinement for twelve hours to that kind of labor in itself makes a man become dull and apathetic,” according to Robert Howard, future member of the Massachusetts legislature and mulespinner active in the ten-hour campaign. Shorter hours, Howard continued, “imparts increased energy to his system and enables him to stick closer to his work while he is at it.”²⁰

Massachusetts textile unionists also pointed to the age and hours regulations that were already in effect in England, claiming that no harm had been done to the

¹⁹ Testimony of Frank Foster, 8-9 and 12 February 1883, in United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Report of the Committee of the Senate Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 59; Dickinson, Shall We Legislate Upon the Hours of Labor?, 21. Frank Foster’s roots in the labor community ran deep. He was a printer by trade and elected president of the Boston Typographical Union in 1882. He was also a prominent member of the Boston Central Labor Union, the Knights of Labor, and the Massachusetts Federation of Trades. He began publication of the Labor Leader in 1887, serving as both editor and publisher.

competitiveness of British-made textiles in the marketplace. Massachusetts textile manufacturers, however, disagreed. They countered the arguments made by labor lobbyists as to why a ten-hour law was prudent, point by point. The industrialists articulated a position and voiced opinions against the passage of hours restriction legislation that they would come back to time and again throughout the 1880s and 1890s. On the issue of the healthfulness of textile manufacturing work, Bay State mill owners made the case that while conditions in the mills were not as ideal as laboring outdoors, the health and welfare of textile operatives would be far worse if they did not have the food, clothing, and shelter that wages earned in textile mills provided them. Rather than directly addressing the contention that the physical condition of women and children were in need of protection, Massachusetts manufacturers instead attacked and challenged the manhood of the lobbying unionists by reiterating the fact that a reduction in hours for women and children would, because mills could not be run without them, be applied to men as well. “Let us not believe,” sniped one mill owner, “that in America, labor has become so weak and helpless that it must be protected against the encroachments of this tyrant, capital.”21 In addition, these manufacturers found the argument that a reduction in hours would make operatives more productive specious because they perceived labor done in textile factories as easy and light, requiring mill hands to do nothing more than tend machinery that did all the actual work, noting that their employees would not be able to earn as much in ten hours as in eleven making the practical result of a reduction of hours the same as a wage cut.22

21 Dickinson, Shall We Legislate Upon the Hours of Labor?, 8, 23.
22 Ibid., 18-19.
It was the issue of competitiveness, however, that elicited the strongest reaction from the anti-restriction textile manufacturers. They saw the movement for hours restrictions in Massachusetts as originating with British operatives who migrated to work in New England mills, arguing that governmental intervention in the conditions of work was inherently un-American. “Let us encourage no such governmental interference here in America,” argued one manufacturer who saw state labor regulations as an infringement on individual liberty, “This is not France, or Prussia, or Austria or England . . . . we ought to shrink from taking such a step.” Likewise, any presumed outcome of hours restriction based on the example of regulatory legislation in England, according to the industrialists, was fundamentally flawed. Legislation in England, manufacturers pointed out, covered the nation as a whole while regulatory laws in Massachusetts would place the Commonwealth’s mills at a competitive disadvantage due to the fact that they would have no bearing on any state but Massachusetts. Textile companies in other New England states would have the advantage of running longer hours, producing more and, because Massachusetts mill owners assumed operatives would want an increase in hourly and piecework pay so that they would make as much in ten hours as they had for eleven, of paying their employees lower hourly wages. The presumption of many pro-regulation activists that Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Maine would follow the lead of Massachusetts in passing hours legislation was, according to the textile lobby, without foundation because “all selfish interests” would guarantee that textile manufacturers outside of Massachusetts would resist anything that would take away competitive advantages they had over the mills located in the Bay State.24

23 Dickinson, Shall We Legislate Upon the Hours of Labor?, 29-30.
24 Ibid., 20.
Numerous state legislators were responsive to labor’s call for the ten-hour day and they introduced bills into the Massachusetts House and Senate in 1871, 1872, and 1873 that would limit the hours of work to ten per day and sixty per week for women and all persons under the age of eighteen employed by manufacturing establishments that made cotton, woolen, jute, or silk fabrics. Massachusetts textile interests complained of a “growing tendency of our state to discriminate against capital,” and warned the politicians supporting ten-hour restriction that “there was a growing feeling among capitalists in Massachusetts that their rights no longer commanded that full respect which was once accorded them,” leading manufacturers to “withdraw money from our corporate institutions and send it elsewhere for investment.”

The bills passed the House each year but were regularly defeated in the industry-friendly Senate. A majority of Senators called, instead, for voluntary hours restrictions throughout the New England industry so as to prevent placing Massachusetts mills at a competitive disadvantage. Ten-hour agitators blamed the consistent failure of the bills on agents hired by the largest textile concerns in Massachusetts and charged that these lobbyists secured the defeat of the bills “not by argument, not by facts, but by treachery, by bribery, by intimidation, and by corruption.”

With the support of Republican Governor William Washburn, the provisions of the previous ten-hour bills were changed in 1874 to include workers in all manufacturing establishments and to allow readjustments of the daily hour maximums so that a half-day could be worked on Saturdays. Opposition to the ten-hour law continued, however, until the addition of a compromise amendment, including the word “willful” in

25 Dickinson, *Shall We Legislate Upon the Hours of Labor?*, 8-9.
26 “Address to the Workingmen of Lowell,” 24 August 1870, quoted in Dickinson, *Shall We Legislate Upon the Hours of Labor?*, 27.
the penalty clause of the 1874 bill.27 As was the case with the word "knowingly" in the
1867 child employment and education act, the amendment was a loophole intended to
make enforcement of the law virtually impossible. Nevertheless, the 1874 Massachusetts
ten-hour bill passed "for the protection of the health of a large class of women of the
State, and for the advancement of education among the children of . . . manufacturing
communities," and despite its flaws, was the first sixty-hour law in the nation.28

The 1874 ten-hour act reiterated the supposition, first seen in Massachusetts with
the 1867 child employment and education act, that the state had a right to regulate
working conditions in the interest of "dependent" citizens. Massachusetts textile mill
owners, however, largely ignored the provisions of the ten-hour statute until an 1879
amendment to the act struck the word "willful" from the law. Regardless of intent,
manufacturers were now liable for prosecution and a fine of up to fifty dollars if women
or anyone under eighteen years old worked more than sixty hours a week. Increased
enforcement by state factory inspectors and the ability to more easily prosecute offenders
forced growing numbers of Massachusetts textile mill owners to comply with the sixty-
hour provisions from 1879 onward.29

27 The penalty clause for the 1874 act read: "The person, firm or corporation, superintendent,
overseer or agent . . . are fined $50 for 'willful' violation, upon prosecution within one year." From Acts of
the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1874. The provisions of the 1874 ten-hour
act are quoted in their entirety in Whittelsey, Massachusetts Labor Legislation, 113.

28 Persons, "The Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts," 123-125; Whittelsey,
Massachusetts Labor Legislation, 12-13. For an overview of child labor legislation in the U.S. through the
Civil War see Walter Trattner, Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee

29 In addition to the 1879 amendment, a series of changes were made to the 1874 ten-hour act
including the required posting of notices at manufactories stating the daily schedule of work (1880) and
stating machinery start and stop times and meal times (1886 and 1887); the extension of the law's
provisions to mechanical and mercantile establishments (1883); the outlawing of work by children under
fourteen years old between 7pm and 6am (1888); and the outlawing of work by women and all workers
under eighteen years old between 10pm and 6am (1890). For a complete list of changes made to the 1874
ten-hour law between 1874 and 1898, see Whittelsey, Massachusetts Labor Legislation, 113-116.
After passage of the 1874 act, a lull occurred in the agitation for additional labor legislation. The nationwide economic crisis which began in 1873 undercut the strength of many workers' organizations throughout Massachusetts, while the labor strife occurring during this depression pushed many Republicans on Beacon Hill, who had previously supported the Radicals and labor friendly initiatives, into an alliance with pro-business Republicans who conceived of the state not as a mediator of competing interests but as responsible for the maintenance of law and order and the protection of capital. Between the passage of the 1874 ten-hour law and the turn of the century, calls for regulatory laws in Massachusetts increasingly focused on ensuring adequate enforcement of age, education, and hours statutes already enacted, and concentrated on securing protections from the dangers of industrial employment through factory safety and sanitation regulations. Massachusetts passed the nation's first general factory safety act in 1877, establishing requirements for fire escapes, the covering of dangerous machine parts, and the use and operation of elevators, and creating a state factory safety inspection force.

The often overlapping constituencies of textile craft unions, skilled trades unions, and the emergent Knights of Labor and American Federation of Labor continued to be driving forces through the 1880s and 1890s in the movement for more and better enforced regulatory legislation in Massachusetts. "The object of all these organizations is of course much the same, to obtain the advancement of wage workers . . . in financial and social condition," noted Massachusetts unionist Frank Foster. "In order to attain these ends," he continued, "we have to direct our attention toward securing such legislation as

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will . . . obtain for the individual laborer a fair opportunity to compete with associated capital.”

The Knights of Labor was the first labor organization in the United States that spearheaded a nationwide lobbying effort to secure laws that would advance the needs of the “producing classes.” For industrial workers affiliated with the Knights in Massachusetts, this call to use the state to forward workers’ interests resulted in movements seeking further reductions of hours for manufacturing establishments, the creation of a state board of arbitration, the passage of an employer liability act, and the abolition of the fining system used in textile mills throughout the state. “The fact that our jurisdiction extends over our whole State is an advantage,” argued Knights of Labor, District 30 Master Workman, Albert Carlton, “as it makes it possible to exert a more powerful influence upon legislative action . . . . [W]e appear a body whose jurisdiction is equal to that of the Legislature itself.”

Starting in 1884, the legislative committee of the Knights of Labor, District 30 made regular appearances before various committees of the Massachusetts legislature to argue in favor of pro-labor bills and endorsed candidates for state office who supported the Knights’ legislative agenda. The Knights’ regular attendance at legislative sessions succeeded in convincing many politicians on Beacon Hill that an organization existed “for the purpose of making, watching, and if necessary, unmaking those delegated to frame . . . laws.”

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31 Testimony of Frank Foster, 8-9 and 12 February 1883, in United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Report of the Committee of the Senate Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital, vol. 1, 79.
33 Knights of Labor, District 30, Record of Proceedings for the Quarterly Session of District Assembly 30, January 1884, 7. Hereafter cited as Quarterly Proceedings.
34 Ibid., April 1884, 8.
In 1885, the Knights of Labor, with support from local textile unionists, succeeded in electing Fall River mulespinner and District 30 legislative committee chairperson Robert Howard to the state Senate as representative of Bristol County. The Massachusetts Democratic Party endorsed a platform in 1886 including the reforms called for by members of District 30 of the Knights of Labor. To the chagrin of businessmen throughout the state, Democrats in the legislature were successful in getting many labor statutes passed by 1887. "The Massachusetts legislature of 1886 is a radical body as regards labor enactments," noted the Commercial Bulletin, "The Senate and House vie with each other in this respect." At the height of its success, the Knights of Labor claimed a membership in Massachusetts of over 26,000 men and more than 4,000 women, including over 5,000 workers employed in textile mills throughout the state. "I tell you here and now," Edward Atkinson chastised the audience at an address given at Boston’s Central Labor Lyceum, "that by the Acts of the Legislature which you have tried for, and some of which have been passed, and by way of by-laws of your Knights of Labor, your clubs, and your associations which you have tried to force people to adopt, you are driving capital out of the State." Atkinson explicitly blamed the Knights for creating the perception among Massachusetts businessmen, especially owners of textile

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36 Commercial Bulletin, 1 May 1886.

37 Knights of Labor, District 30, Quarterly Proceedings, 1887, 24. In Chicopee, Massachusetts, where the Dwight Manufacturing Company was located, the Knights of Labor had two local assemblies of several hundred members from 1884-1887. Vera Shlakman, however, noted that local workers used the Chicopee assemblies “more for social clubs than for labor agitation.” Shlakman, “Economic History of a Factory Town: A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts,” in Smith College Studies in History, vol. 20 (Northampton, MA: Department of History of Smith College, 1935), 193. See also, Knights of Labor, District Assembly 30, Quarterly Proceedings, July 1886, 22.

mills, that the Bay State was friendly to labor’s interests, as exhibited through the passage of reform legislation, but was hostile to those of capital, an opinion that Massachusetts manufacturers would echo time and again in the decades to come.

The Knights of Labor’s 1886 nationwide movement for the eight-hour day swelled the ranks of the local assemblies that comprised District 30, but following a failed general strike by members of the building trades in Boston that year, the Knights began a slow decline in Massachusetts. Knights of Labor members in the textile industry gradually withdrew from the body and affiliated with various national organizations of independent craft unions.\(^{39}\) The Knights of Labor, however, left an indelible mark on legislation passed in Massachusetts during the 1880s. “[A]s in the case of the ten-hour law, and many recent enactments intended to further the interests of wage workers, the Bay State is a conspicuous and daring leader,” lamented the editor of the *Commercial Bulletin*, attributing this to the fact that, “. . . the Knights of Labor have a very strong hold there.”\(^{40}\) During the years in which the Knights of Labor played an active part in shaping the political landscape of Massachusetts, the legislature created a state Board of Conciliation and Arbitration (1886), passed an employer liability act (1887), limited the use of the fining system for imperfect weaving (1887), enacted a law allowing labor unions to become incorporated entities (1888), established state requirements for the cleaning of machinery, ventilation, uniform meal hours for women and minors, and fire prevention in manufacturing establishments (1887), progressively increased the age and


\(^{40}\) *Commercial Bulletin*, 27 February 1886.
education requirements for the employment of minors (1883, 1885, 1887, 1888, 1889),
and outlawed night work in manufactories by minors (1888) and women (1890).41

As the power of the Knights of Labor waned in Massachusetts during the late
1880s and early 1890s, the Massachusetts State Federation of Labor, organized in 1887
as a state body representing Massachusetts unions affiliated with the American
Federation of Labor, continued to promote a pro-labor agenda at the statehouse. While
the national AFL leadership, especially Samuel Gompers, often shied away from the
union’s endorsement of candidates or a specific political party at the turn of the century,
state federations of labor led reform campaigns, gave backing to labor-friendly
candidates, lobbied legislatures, testified before committees, sometimes wrote and
sponsored specific labor bills, and formed alliances with other reform groups active in
seeking protective or regulatory legislation. “State legislatures form the most favorable
point of attack and most of the legislative reforms we advocate must be obtained through
this medium,” argued Frank Foster, future AFL Legislative Committee chairperson, “If
possible, some special committee should be had in each State, whose duty it should be to
formulate and advocate such laws as are deemed practicable to present.”42 In this
capacity, the Massachusetts State Federation of Labor carried the political agitation of the
Knights of Labor into the twentieth century.43

41 For a complete digest of the acts and their provisions passed during these years see Whittelsey,
Massachusetts Labor Legislation, 107-143.
42 Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, Report of Proceedings of
the Fourth Annual Session of the Federation, 1884, 26.
43 Massachusetts State Federation of Labor, History of the Massachusetts State Federation of
the AFL, CIO and AFL-CIO Proceedings 1885-1874, Held in the AFL-CIO Library (Westport, CT:
Greenwood Press, 1975), x-xii. For an analysis of the Gompers-AFL political strategy in the 1880s and
1890s see Julie Greene, Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political
The Massachusetts State Federation of Labor established a legislative committee at its 1891 convention and adopted several legislative resolutions, including one calling for a fifty-eight-hour law for women and children and one that provided the funding for a permanent, paid lobbyist to the Massachusetts legislature. Upon the introduction of a fifty-eight-hour bill during the 1891 Massachusetts legislative session, representatives of the State Federation of Labor and men appearing on behalf of the Arkwright Club and individual textile mills throughout the state, lobbied aggressively at the statehouse to see that their respective positions on the bill would be known. Indeed, throughout the 1890s and continuing through the first decades of the twentieth century, Massachusetts textile mill owners attempted to check the ability of labor organizations to influence public policy through group action and lobbying efforts of their own. "The millions of the Arkwright club are massed against [the fifty-eight-hour bill]. Its agents are turning heaven and earth to secure its defeat," announced the editor of the Massachusetts State Federation of Labor's official newspaper. "Two trained counsel are button-holing each senator," he continued, "and pulling all conceivable wires to prevent the passage of the measure." The efforts of the textile industry lobby, nevertheless, were unsuccessful. By promising to make use of a blacklist of legislators who voted against the fifty-eight-hour bill, ably cultivating support among House and Senate Democrats, and relentlessly petitioning House and Senate committees for favorable reports on the fifty-eight-hour bill, the Massachusetts State Federation of Labor helped enact the law reducing the hours

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44 Massachusetts State Federation of Labor, *History of the Massachusetts State Federation of Labor*, 23. The Arkwright Club's members were corporate officers and senior-most management of textile mills located throughout New England. The club's headquarters were in Boston. For a complete listing of paid lobbyists to the Massachusetts legislature beginning in 1891, see Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Lobbyist Section, Dockets of Legislative Agents, 1891-1986. Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, MA.

45 *Labor Leader*, 23 April 1892.
of labor for women and children in the state’s manufacturing establishments from sixty to fifty-eight per week.\textsuperscript{46}

Many New England legislatures eventually passed laws regulating working hours, factory conditions, and ages of employment. As early as 1894, every northeastern state had factory regulations in place that mandated basic safety and sanitation measures. In 1900, the sixty-hour week was standard throughout the industrialized Northeast, with numerous states having child labor laws that established minimum ages for employment, mandated educational requirements, and prohibited night work.\textsuperscript{47} The actual compliance with regulatory laws by factory owners and workers alike, varied from community to community and state to state. By the turn of the century though, Massachusetts’ inspection and enforcement mechanisms for its labor legislation were the most sophisticated in the nation. “Massachusetts enjoys the unique distinction . . . of possessing a large staff of factory inspectors,” Florence Kelley of the National Consumers’ League noted, “Massachusetts is, accordingly the only state of which it may be confidently asserted that its child labor law is uniformly and effectively enforced.”\textsuperscript{48} Some industrialists continued to completely ignore state labor laws, preferring to pay the nominal penalties when caught, while adult industrial workers often falsified age and schooling certificates so that their children could find gainful employment and contribute to the family economy even if legally underage. According to historian Daniel Nelson,

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\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Labor Leader,} 23 April 1892.
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however, the threat of prosecution was usually enough to force compliance with most workplace regulations and “the impact of regulatory legislation in most states was substantial.”\footnote{Nelson, Managers and Workers, 149.}

Despite the labor legislation passed during the decade, the late 1880s were profitable years for New England mills. “And yet, with all their disadvantages,” Richard Edmonds of the Manufacturers’ Record noted, “Northern mills are earning large profits. The reports from New England mills . . . during 1888 were very large . . . the Dwight [paid dividends of] 10 per cent.”\footnote{Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 14, no. 15.} For mills throughout New England, the dividends of the late 1880s, however, often turned into losses during the 1890s. Throughout the decade, Massachusetts textile concerns found themselves beset by problems. Increasing southern competition in markets at home and abroad only intensified the impact that a drop in the demand for cotton goods, which began in the fall of 1890, had on New England manufacturers. Coarse goods were the mainstay of the majority of Massachusetts cotton textile mills and southern encroachment on coarse goods markets was of particular concern to them. “Severe competition is now experienced from the Southern mills,” noted the Commercial Bulletin, “and the pressure from this quarter is constantly increasing.”\footnote{Commercial Bulletin, 4 April 1891.} During the depression years of 1893 to 1897, southern competition and poor economic conditions forced companies throughout New England to significantly curtail operations or close completely and forego paying dividends, while southern mill building and textile production continued unabated. Warehouses full of unsold fabric, the hours restrictions recently imposed by the state legislature, and growing
labor unrest, engendered a sense of crisis among the owners of cotton textile mills throughout Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{52}

During the depression years of the 1890s, the New England textile industry press and manufacturers' organizations focused their attentions on devising solutions to the question of what to do about southern competition. One possible answer was for Massachusetts mills to avoid the challenge of southern manufacturers entirely by switching their production from coarse and medium goods to fine goods. As early as 1882, the \textit{Boston Journal of Commerce} argued that the only way New England mills would be able to continue operating profitably as more and more southern mills were constructed, was to diversify and "get into finer goods."\textsuperscript{53} By the 1890s, diversification made sense to increasing numbers of Massachusetts coarse goods manufacturers. According to Arthur Lowe, president of the New England Cotton Manufacturers' Association, a conversion to the making of fine goods was a pathway to future profits, not only because there was no southern competition in the markets for the highest thread-count cotton goods, but also since most fine goods sold in the United States were imported from England and mainland Europe. New England had a competitive advantage over southern mills in the production of fine goods, Lowe added, because of the overall lack of skill among operatives in the southern textile workforce.\textsuperscript{54}

The problem with the fine goods strategy, noted the \textit{Commercial Bulletin}, was that "the process of turning over into a finer line . . . can only gradually be

accomplished." Installing new machinery and retraining a workforce necessitated a substantial outlay of money and the investment of a significant amount of time. Breaking into the domestic fine goods market, which was dominated by overseas producers, furthermore, would not be easy. Massachusetts manufacturers saw tariff protections as the way this could successfully be accomplished but they were not guaranteed and the effects of tariff revisions, in any case, would not be felt immediately. The issues of time, money, and markets, when taken together with the fact that southern mill operatives would undoubtedly gain the skills necessary to produce fine goods as the South’s textile industry matured, meant that the fine goods strategy would be, at best, a stop-gap solution for Massachusetts textile companies.\footnote{Commercial Bulletin, 19 January 1895.}

The replacement of old machinery with the latest spinning and weaving technology was another way proposed by textile manufacturers interested in forwarding the competitive position of Massachusetts-made cotton goods in the marketplace. The “salvation [of the Massachusetts textile industry] depends on . . . recognition of the demands of the market, the possibility of changing her product from coarse to fine and from fine to finer goods, and the introduction of new and up-to-date machinery,” argued Charles Pidgin, Chief of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor, noting in 1905 that “No half-way measures can be tolerated.”\footnote{NECMA Transactions, Annual Meeting, 1900, 167-168. Regarding the importance of skill in creating a New England advantage over the South in fine goods production during the 1890s see David Doane, “Regional Cost Differentials and Textile Location: A Statistical Analysis,” \textit{Explorations in Economic History} 9 (Fall 1971): 3-34, especially 22; and Marvin Fischbaum, “An Economic Analysis of the Southern Capture of the Cotton Textile Industry Progressing to 1910” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1965), 116-118.}

\footnote{Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor, \textit{Cotton Manufactures in Massachusetts and the Southern States} (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Company, 1905), 102-103.} Much of the discussion related to updating Massachusetts textile mill machinery focused on the fact that the majority of...
Piedmont mills were decades younger than New England mills and when they were built, southern mill owners installed automatic looms and ring spinning machines, or if they initially used older machinery, rapidly replaced it.  

The introduction of the Northrop automatic loom in the 1880s made weaving more efficient and cost-effective. Before the Northrop loom, weaving took place on looms, which stopped and required the weaver to put into place a new bobbin of yarn every time the shuttle supplying yarn to the machine ran out. The Northrop loom made this constant stoppage and replacement of bobbins unnecessary, as it was designed so that a weaver could install numerous bobbins at one time, which would rotate and automatically resupply the loom with yarn when needed. Not only did the Northrop loom make weaving operations more efficient, it also increased the amount of looms one worker could capably tend. Although the Northrop loom was an expensive investment, piece rates for weavers working on this machinery in southern mills were about half those paid to weavers working on the plain looms used more extensively in New England. Because weavers were the most numerous and among the highest paid workers in cotton textile manufacturing, the implementation of this newest weaving technology gave southern mills a distinct cost advantage.  

The use of ring spinning machinery also benefited southern mill owners in their competition with Massachusetts textile manufacturers. Before the introduction of the ring spindle in 1870, the spinning of cotton took place on mule spindles, which entailed a

long period of training for those learning to use the machinery and required skilled craftsmen to successfully maneuver. The ring spindle, however, was automatic. Ring spinning increased the speed of yarn production and lowered the level of strength and skill required by operatives tending the machinery, allowing southern manufacturers to employ large numbers of low-skill and low-wage women and children as spinners. An important consideration for Massachusetts textile manufacturers in their decisions about whether or not to invest the capital necessary to overhaul the mule spinning machinery in a mill, was the fact that mulespinners typically received the highest wages and were the best organized segment of the labor force in any New England mill. Ridding one’s mill of mulespinners would also eradicate the mulespinners’ union.60

As was the case with switching from coarse to fine goods production, the proposal for replacing outdated machinery as the solution for effectively meeting southern competition in the short-term, foundered on the issues of time and money. Although southern mills were better equipped and were able to use ring spindles and Northrop looms to gain a competitive advantage over goods made in New England, Massachusetts mill owners often found it too costly to immediately put aside their old machinery. Completely retooling mills with thousands of looms and hundreds of thousands of spindles would not happen overnight, and while some Massachusetts mills began replacing worn-out mule spindles and plain looms with ring spindles and Northrop looms as early as the 1880s, it was a gradual process. Mulespinners, moreover, balked at management’s attempts to replace mule spindles with rings. “[C]ertain manufacturers

openly charge the operatives with obstructing progress by opposing the use of improved machinery by resorting to agitation and strikes," asserted Herbert Walmsley of New Bedford, Massachusetts, “forcing manufacturers to abandon the use of improved machinery . . . designed to . . . decrease the cost of production.” Mulespinners resisted the implementation of ring spindles as much as possible as this would undermine the control the spinners exerted in the mills over wages, working conditions, and entrance into their craft. By the turn of the century, however, manufacturers had replaced mule spindles in New England mills to such an extent that the trade was becoming obsolete. At the time it affiliated with the United Textile Workers of America in 1901, the National Spinners’ Union, at most, had 2,500 mulespinners as members.

While Massachusetts textile manufacturers debated the relative merits of fine goods production and the installation of new machinery, the labor legislation that had been passed in the Commonwealth became a lightning rod for criticism. “The long predicted has come,” wrote the editor of the *Commercial Bulletin* in 1897, “There is stress . . . . Too much machinery has been installed. Too many mills have been built. Massachusetts has led the way on reducing hours of labor and suffers from her liberality.” Regulatory labor laws were already in place throughout the Northeast before southern competition had grown acute for Massachusetts cotton manufacturers but in the 1890s, Massachusetts mill owners increasingly sought to shape public policies that would help them remain competitive with southern manufacturers in the production of

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63 *Commercial Bulletin*, 13 November 1897.
coarse cotton goods. According to the leading mill men of Massachusetts, the state’s hours and ages regulations, when coupled with the low wages paid to southern operatives, made it impossible for Massachusetts-made goods to compete successfully with those manufactured in southern cotton mills. Massachusetts manufacturers extended the argument, which they made during the 1870s and 1880s, that regulatory legislation made it more difficult for them to compete with mills in other New England states, to include the impact that the laws had on competition with mills in the Piedmont South as well. The issue of the ability of Massachusetts textile mills to remain viable businesses despite state mandated age and hours standards shifted from being one of intra-regional significance to one of inter-regional concern.

Restrictive laws in Massachusetts “have been piling up . . . touching cotton manufacturers until they cannot stand it much longer,” noted T. Jefferson Coolidge, President of the Dwight Manufacturing Company in 1894. “The restrictions so imposed have tended to make production unprofitable,” he continued, “and manufacturers surely cannot be expected to continue business in that case.” As early as 1874, when Massachusetts enacted the ten-hour law for women and children, textile mills in the state were effectively restricted to a maximum workweek of sixty hours. By 1892, this workweek had been further reduced to fifty-eight-hours while other New England mills ran sixty hours a week and mills in the Piedmont South typically ran eleven to twelve hours a day, with workweeks ranging from sixty-six to seventy-two hours. The Arkwright Club estimated that when the long hours run and the low wages paid in southern cotton mills were taken together, they made the cost of labor in the South about forty percent less than in Massachusetts. According to the club, labor costs alone were

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“sufficient to account fully for the difference between the prosperity of southern manufacturing and the adversity of northern mills; between the activity in the construction of new mills at the South and the stagnation of a similar industry” in Massachusetts.65

Richard Edmonds of the Manufacturers’ Record viewed “the hours of labor in Massachusetts . . . with undisguised delight,” but the editor of the Commercial Bulletin came to the conclusion that “the time has come when intelligent people must say to the Legislature when restrictive labor laws are proposed, Hands off our industries!”66 As the 1893 depression wore on, some Massachusetts textile manufacturers went one step beyond simply calling for a moratorium on the passage of any new regulatory legislation in the Commonwealth. Understanding that it was low-cost labor in combination with long hours gave the South its greatest competitive advantage, Massachusetts textile manufacturers’ associations began lobbying for the reversal of existing regulatory laws. “Manufacturers must act for themselves,” argued the Arkwright Club in 1897, “and endeavor to introduce in their own mills conditions more nearly resembling those of their southern competitors.” The strategy the Arkwright Club proposed for effecting this change was to lower wages, while at the same time working for the complete repeal of ages and hours legislation already functioning in Massachusetts. The Arkwright Club called on Massachusetts textile manufacturers to “act all together for the common defence [sic]” and with the New England Cotton Manufacturers’ Association,

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65 Arkwright Club, Report of the Committee on Southern Competition, 1897, 3. Sarah Whittelsey estimated that southern labor costs at the turn of the century were thirty to forty percent less than those in Massachusetts. See Whittelsey, Massachusetts Labor Legislation, 54-55. While the hours worked and wages paid varied from mill to mill and state to state, Mary Oates described the overall differences in wages and hours between Massachusetts mills and mills in the Piedmont South as “striking.” See Oates, The Role of the Cotton Textile Industry in the Economic Development of the American Southeast, 116.
66 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 23, no. 16; Commercial Bulletin, 19 January 1895.
spearheaded a lobbying effort at the state legislature, “to give expression in the strongest
terms to the importance of seeking a reversal of the policy which has handicapped New
England, and which has placed a double burden upon Massachusetts.”67

The turn-of-the-century repeal campaigns of the Massachusetts manufacturers’
groups were unsuccessful. The Massachusetts State Federation of Labor took the lead in
opposing the Arkwright Club’s attempts to have the state’s regulatory legislation
nullified. The unionists pursued a “vigorous policy of education,” sending Massachusetts
State Federation of Labor representatives to seventy-eight state legislative hearings on the
matter of rescinding regulatory statutes, and having one member present at every regular
legislative session so that, “the schemes of the Arkwright club were defeated.”68 With
their repeal strategy stymied, arguments began surfacing from among manufacturers’
groups that the solution to the problem of southern competition was not to be found in
lowering standards in Massachusetts mills, but in raising those prevalent in southern
mills.

Massachusetts textile unionists had long advocated better standards for southern
textile workers as a means of protecting the gains they had already achieved. The effect
of cutting wages in New England mills and undoing the labor legislation in
Massachusetts “would simply be to press downward the condition of all” argued the
American Federation of Labor, “the mill owners might well turn about . . . and, instead of
antagonizing the efforts of organized labor . . . co-operate with them and the great labor

67 Arkwright Club, Report of the Committee on Southern Competition, 8, 6-7; Andrea Tone also
discusses employer associations, such as the National Association of Manufacturers, and their challenges to
federal and state regulatory initiatives at the turn of the century. See Tone, The Business of Benevolence,
21-29.
68 American Federation of Labor, Massachusetts State Branch, Proceedings of the Thirteenth
Annual Convention, 1898, 13-14.
movement of the country in the effort to equalize, not to tear down . . . the textile workers of the South." Some Massachusetts industrialists, as well as many Bay State politicians, agreed with the logic of the AFL. "Let the labor unions raise the other States up," asserted the Commercial Bulletin, while Senator Henry Cabot Lodge noted "The cotton mills [of Massachusetts] are suffering from Southern competition . . . . The southern operatives must be brought up to our standard . . . . To this important work I hope our labor unions will address themselves." Indeed, labor organizations would be key players in the turn-of-the-century agitation for the passage of regulatory legislation in the textile states of the Piedmont South and in lobbying Congress for national hours legislation.

A minority of Massachusetts textile manufacturers adopted a stance during the 1890s that if factory regulation was a necessary evil with which they had to deal, then restrictions on hours and child labor should be imposed equally throughout the entire industry. These manufacturers rejected the repeal strategy first put forth by the Arkwright Club’s Committee on Southern Competition and refocused their efforts and energies toward agitating for national legislation as the best way to equalize the disparity of conditions between Massachusetts and southern textile mills. After an 1895 meeting at which Massachusetts textile manufacturers discussed the pros and cons of the

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69 American Federationist, vol. 4, no. 12.
70 Commercial Bulletin, 18 December 1897; Lodge quoted in Hearden, Independence and Empire, 101.
71 At the 1899 AFL annual convention, delegates adopted a resolution proposed by Massachusetts mulespinner Thomas O’Donnell stating, “Whereas, The people employed in the textile industries of New England, having carried on an agitation for the reduction of hours of labor for several years; and . . . Although many bills have been presented in the various State legislatures for the reduction of said hours, but have all been defeated; Resolved, That the American Federation of Labor pledge itself to do all that is in its power to bring about the passage of a national law for the reduction of the hours of labor.” See American Federation of Labor, Report of the Nineteenth Annual Convention, 1899, 107. For an overview of AFL political activities at the national level before World War I, see Greene, Pure and Simple Politics.
implementation of national labor standards as a means of neutralizing southern
competition, Richard Edmonds wryly noted, “This very kind and generous proposition of
our New England friend, will hardly come to pass in his day.” The issue of federal
regulation of working hours in textile mills remained a hotly contested issue for the next
three years. The southern industry press described the efforts of New England
manufacturers to have a law passed in Congress that would limit every mill in the United
States to running ten hours a day, “a direct blow at the South” with “the animus of the
movement . . . to inflict upon the South the same labor trouble[s] that are such a menace
to Northern manufacturers.” Southern mill owners, however, were confident that their
representatives in Congress would not allow a national hours law to pass, noting that
“what the laboring people of the South want is not shorter hours of labor but more
factories where they can obtain steady employment, knowing that work and plenty of it is
the salvation of every country and every people.” In 1897, members of the Labor
Committee of the Massachusetts Senate endorsed the passage of federal legislation that
would create uniform hours of work for the employees of industries throughout the
United States. William Lovering of Massachusetts introduced a resolution into the U.S.
House the following year, calling for a Constitutional amendment to authorize Congress
to establish national labor standards. The Lovering resolution found support from some
New England textile manufacturers and their strange bedfellow, the AFL, but was
defeated in committee after prominent industrialists, including southern textile
manufacturers, lobbied aggressively against it.\textsuperscript{75}

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\item[72] \textit{Manufacturers’ Record}, vol. 27, no. 2.
\item[73] \textit{Southern and Western Textile Excelsior}, 29 February 1896.
\item[74] \textit{NECMA Transactions}, Annual Meeting, 1897; Hearden, \textit{Independence and Empire}, 88.
\item[75] Hearden, \textit{Independence and Empire}, 385-387.
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As manufacturers, politicians, and unionists debated solutions that might mitigate the effects of southern competition on the Massachusetts textile industry, the city of Chicopee felt the full brunt of the 1893 economic depression. The city’s two largest employers, the Dwight Manufacturing Company and the Chicopee Manufacturing Company, were cotton textile concerns, and in 1890, when the population of Chicopee numbered 14,050, the Dwight Manufacturing Company was the largest manufactory in the city, employing over 2,000 operatives. Despite the growth of other industries since the 1860s, the city of Chicopee remained primarily a mill town. The cotton manufacturing industry was the foundation of the local economy, with entire families dependent on the wages they earned in textile manufacturing, and with businesses throughout the city reliant on a steady income from the thousands of operatives who earned their livelihoods in the mills.\textsuperscript{76} The announcement made by the Dwight Company in August of 1893 that it would institute either a ten percent wage reduction or a complete mill shutdown in September, however, did not come as a complete surprise to the community. “In view of the business troubles,” according to the local press, “the announcement was not unexpected.”\textsuperscript{77} The paper reported that the news of the wage cut or curtailment “was taken for the most part quietly by the men,” but the Dwight Company’s notice precipitated a local labor crisis which intersected with the ages and hours standards established by state labor legislation and the inter-regional fight for control of the coarse goods market to create the conditions that marked a turning-point in the history of the Dwight Manufacturing Company.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{77} Springfield (MA) Republican, 22 August 1893.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
As was the case throughout Massachusetts, the management of the Dwight Manufacturing Company had been engaged in an ongoing struggle with organized labor in its mills throughout the 1870s and 1880s. During these years, Dwight employees took part in collective actions intended primarily to prevent wage reductions or to demand wage increases. Dwight management, meanwhile, attempted to keep organized labor from becoming firmly entrenched in its mills. The owners of the Dwight Company perceived their ability to have complete managerial control over the production process undermined by the progression of labor laws passed by the state legislature as well as by their battles with striking workers in the mills. In the minds of the Dwight Company’s owners, their dealings with legislators and with labor reached the breaking point in the 1890s.

The small, sporadic, departmental walk-outs that the Dwight Manufacturing Company experienced during the 1850s and 1860s became large-scale protests during the 1873 and 1893 economic depressions. The Dwight Company’s first union-led strike occurred in April 1874, lasted five weeks and, according to the local press, was “one of the most remarkable strikes which has ever occurred in this region.”79 Several months after management instituted a fifteen percent wage reduction in December 1873, Dwight mulespinners petitioned the company for a return to the old schedule of wages noting that “ever since [the December wage cut] we have faithfully continued to work for the reduced rates—But that there has been no corresponding reduction in the cost of living, rents and provisions being high as ever, and every day sinking us more and more into

79 *Springfield (MA) Republican*, 9 May 1874.
debt.” George Bedlow, Agent of the Chicopee mill, refused the mulespinners’ request, which led them to leave the Dwight mills, en masse, on 3 April 1874.80

The mulespinners’ strike forced the closure of two of Dwight’s seven mills and idled weavers in the remaining five mills as they had no materials with which to work. The Chicopee strikers prepared for a protracted battle, supported by contributions from mulespinners in Lowell, Fall River, and Lawrence to help support them and their families during the struggle with the Dwight Company. Because of the depressed condition of the economy, the Dwight Company felt no need to negotiate with the mulespinners, assuming that their places could be filled by mulespinners from other textile centers who were looking for work. The Dwight spinners, however, successfully deterred scab workers from taking their places by picketing at the mill and at Chicopee railroad stations “warning away spinners from other villages, who are desirous of obtaining work.”81 Of the fifteen mulespinners that Agent Bedlow was able to engage during the first two weeks of the strike, all but one left the company’s employ days after being hired. The company was able to keep this one mulespinner at work as he was “furnished a home in one of the company’s blocks, and . . . kept ‘under guard.’”82

80 Signed Petition for Old Rate of Wages to George Bedlow, Chicopee Agent, April 1874, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, M0-2, Folder 13. Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard University, Boston, MA; Springfield (MA) Republican, 6 April 1874. The textile industry utilized corporate titles that were used among merchant capitalists during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Within the management of textile corporations, the “Treasurer” was one of the chief executives of the company, the “Agent” was the person in charge of the operation of the mill(s), the “Superintendent” was an assistant to the Agent, was often in charge of coordinating day-to-day operations at the mill, and was the person to whom department heads and overseers reported. Evelyn Knowlton, Pepperell’s Progress: History of a Cotton Textile Company, 1844-1945 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 29.

81 Springfield (MA) Republican, 13 April 1874 and 30 April 1874. Laurence Gross discussed the financial support that Lowell mulespinners gave to the Dwight strikers in The Course of Industrial Decline: The Boott Cotton Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1835-1955 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 89.

82 Springfield (MA) Republican, 16 April 1874.
Still, the unemployment and underemployment caused by the 1873 depression gave the Dwight Company an advantage in its attempts to replace the striking mulespinners. The strike began to fail when the company succeeded in hiring enough replacement workers to run nearly three-fourths of the company’s mules, when company boardinghouse keepers were instructed to evict strikers and their families, and when the local business community began to “thoroughly condemn [the strikers’] course, as their obstinacy” caused “a general and increasing depression in business.”83 This lack of support from the wider community handicapped the mulespinners, but, more importantly, the spinners were unable to secure the backing of Dwight’s weavers who went back to work when the strikebreakers restarted the idled mules, undermining the ability of the mulespinners to use the disruption of production to force the company to negotiate with them. Agent Bedlow announced on 4 May 1874 that the company would not recognize the mulespinners as a group and that “the strikers will not be taken back as a body, but will be re-engaged, if at all, singly.” When faced with certain loss of their jobs, the Dwight mulespinners ended the strike, and those who were rehired, returned to work at the reduced pay scale.84 The Dwight mulespinners, who officially organized a local branch of the National Mulespinners’ Union during this 1874 conflict, began what proved to be an extended period of rebuilding.

Another series of wage cuts followed the mulespinners’ strike, and even though Dwight operatives were, according to the local press, barely able “to keep body and soul together, even with the strictest economy,” no other walkouts occurred during the

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83 Springfield (MA) Republican, 23 April 1874 and 4 May 1874; Shlakman, “Economic History of a Factory Town,” 188. On the back of the April 1874 mulespinners’ petition to Agent Bedlow, next to thirty-eight of the mulespinners’ signatures were notations in pencil including the names of women, presumably company boardinghouse keepers, and the addresses of where the men lived.

84 Springfield (MA) Republican, 4 May 1874 and 9 May 1874.
1870s. Shortly after the 1874 strike and continuing into 1880s, the Dwight Manufacturing Company began employing strategies meant to mitigate the possibility of a strong union presence establishing itself throughout the Dwight workforce. In 1878, the company instituted a policy whereby each family renting a company-owned tenement was required to have three members working in Dwight’s mills. The threat of eviction, used successfully by the company in the 1874 strike, was a constant risk and the “three employee” rule made more families directly dependent on the mill as the sole source of income than ever before.

The Dwight Manufacturing Company also began using yellow-dog contracts, giving employment only to those who signed statements agreeing to refrain from joining a union or participating in union led activities. In an 1881 version of the Dwight yellow-dog contract, potential operatives agreed to “abstain from aiding, encouraging or abetting any strike among the help . . . and refrain from encouragement and counseling the help in any disturbance and shall use their efforts to maintain pleasant relations between the help and said Company.” After a short-lived mulespinners’ walkout in May 1883, all employees wishing to return to work had to sign a statement agreeing to “conduct himself properly and refrain from interfering with the rest of the employees of said company and also from instigating or from being interested in instigating any strikes or other movement among said employees by which said employees shall cease work.” The Dwight Company, likewise, blacklisted employees who engaged in collective action,

85 Springfield (MA) Republican, 12 January 1876.
87 Signed Contracts, 1 December 1881 and 11 May 1883, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, M0-2, Folder 13.
guaranteeing that they would have a difficult time finding work in any mill in the area. In 1885, for example, James Cumnock, Agent of the Chicopee mill, corresponded with George Hills, Agent of the Lymann Mills in nearby Holyoke, about Dwight employees who had given Cumnock “some trouble.” Hills assured Cumnock, “I will see that they do not get in our Mill, and shall be very happy to concede with you as has been done heretofore.”

By 1887, Frank Foster, publisher of the Labor Leader noted, “The Dwight manufacturing company virtually has [Chicopee] under its thumbs and controls it in many ways.”

Labor-management conflict flared at the Dwight Manufacturing Company again during the depression of 1893. In the weeks between the announced intention of the company to cut wages or completely curtail production in August of 1893, “the better educated and better paid class of workmen” in the Dwight mills made it known to Agent Cumnock that they thought a “short shut-down would be the more preferable of the two evils” rather than a reduction of wages which could last indefinitely. Debate within the workforce continued, however, as organized mulespinners and loomfixers supported a shutdown while many Dwight workers, especially the Polish weavers in the company’s employ, took the stance that even if the mills were closed, there was no guarantee that the company would not institute lower wages upon its reopening. “A heavy reduction means ‘hard times’ in earnest,” the local press, speaking for the wider community, opined,

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88 George Hills, Lymann Mills Agent, to James Cumnock, Dwight Manufacturing Company Chicopee Agent, 10 September 1885, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, ML-A, Folder 11. In his testimony before the Blair Committee, Frank Foster discussed the practice of using threats of eviction from company-owned tenements and blacklisting as two key things preventing unionization among industrial workers in Massachusetts. See Testimony of Frank Foster, 8-9 and 12 February 1883, in United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Report of the Committee of the Senate Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital, vol. 1, 60-61, 79.
89 Labor Leader, 19 March 1887.
90 Springfield (MA) Republican, 23 August 1893.
noting that "the want which would be occasioned by the throwing of over 2,000 hands entirely out of employment must be avoided at any cost."\textsuperscript{91}

On 4 September 1893, Agent Cumnock instituted a reduction ranging from seven to eight percent on all of Dwight's departmental schedules of wages. Although not members of any formally organized union body, two hundred weavers from Dwight mills 5 and 6 responded to the wage cut by walking out in protest. By day's end an estimated 600 weavers from mills 5, 6, and 7 were on strike. "The majority [of the strikers] are Poles," the local press reported. They left the mill because "their wages are regulated by piece work, not by time . . . and the reduction will cut them down about 10 per cent."\textsuperscript{92}

The company threw an additional 650 operatives out of work when it closed the three of Dwight's seven mills from which the greater part of the striking workers came. In light of the depression and the lessons learned from the 1874 mulespinners' strike, however, other Dwight workers, especially the unionized mulespinners and loomfixers, did not think that conditions were favorable for winning concessions from the company and did not support the weavers' actions with voluntary walkouts of their own.\textsuperscript{93}

The management of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, as was their practice in dealing with workers during previous periods of labor strife, not only refused to bargain with the striking weavers but also used the strike to purge its mills of militant operatives. The company announced that it would reemploy any worker who would return at the reduced wage scales but that the "instigators" of the strike would be "refused employment should they seek it." The weavers also received warning that "the

\textsuperscript{91} Springfield (MA) Republican, 5 September 1893.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 5 September 1893 and 6 September 1893.
company's boarding-house keepers have received orders to give such persons notice."

Indeed, four days into the walkout, Agent Cumnock, showing that he would not even engage in a dialogue with the striking workers, left Chicopee for a two-week trip to Chicago. Given the build-up of goods in its warehouses, the limited demand for cotton textiles, and the continued production in mills 1, 2, 3, and 4, the company felt no compunction to quickly settle the strike. The Dwight Company's intensified focus on labor costs in the face of southern competition, moreover, dictated that it would not let workers prescribe wages through collective action that could put the company at an even greater disadvantage in the coarse goods markets. For Cumnock and the Boston officers of the Dwight Company, any bargaining with the strikers would only encourage workers to use militancy as a negotiating tactic in the future. Less than two weeks after the weavers' walkout, the near impossibility of finding work elsewhere in a depression-plagued industry, the intransigence of the company, and the lack of support from Dwight operatives in the remaining four mills, forced the majority of the strikers back to work at the reduced scale of wages.

"The cotton mills have not been running full time," observed the local press four years after the weavers' strike ended, "... if the city is to depend on these alone for the future, the prospect is gloomy." In the wake of the weavers' strike and while Chicopee remained mired in economic depression, the owners of the Dwight Manufacturing

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94 Springfield (MA) Republican, 6 September 1893.
95 Ibid., 9 September 1893 and 18 September 1893.
96 Ibid., 1 August 1897. The Dwight Company continued to make small profits during 1893 and 1894. The Chicopee mills' gross profits for six months ending November 1893 were $91,558.91; for six months ending May 1894 mills 1, 2, 5, and 7 generated a gross profit of $92,061.09 but mills 3 and 4 saw a gross loss of $11,059.62; for six months ending November 1895, mills 1, 2, 5, and 7 generated a gross profit of $115,507.49 while mills 3 and 4 saw a gross loss of $26,462.56. Extant sources do not tell whether or not the company paid its investors dividends over these years, but in all likelihood a sizeable amount of these gross profits were used to fund the construction of Dwight's southern branch mill. Journals, December 1891-November 1899, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, DB-9.
Company embraced a new strategy for company success. Because southern-made coarse goods continued to undersell those made in Massachusetts, Dwight decided to build a branch plant in the South so that it could remain competitive and profitable without having to convert its production to fine goods. "They are going South determined . . . to control the coarse goods trade," noted the Manufacturers' Record, "They are looking for locations and will build during this period of depression in order to be ready for the return of good times." The Dwight Manufacturing Company banked its future on the company's ability to compete successfully in the coarse goods market by supplementing the production of its Chicopee mill with textiles manufactured in the Piedmont South at a lower price. In spite of calls throughout the New England industry for northern mills to focus their production on fine goods or face inevitable ruin, the Dwight Company had not given up on the possibility that coarse goods manufacture could still be viable for Massachusetts corporations. For the owners of the Dwight Company, the new southern mill would be an extension of, not a replacement for, the Chicopee facilities.

"A reason why some of our mills are planning extensions in the South," argued the Commercial Bulletin, "is to save the value in their trade mark [sic] on certain lines of cheap fabrics in which they have made a reputation. They see the time coming when Southern production will displace these fabrics unless they can be made under as favorable auspices." After more than fifty years in business, the Dwight name and trademarks were known worldwide. In fact, the company had found a way to couple its name recognition with the "advantages" that southern mills had by virtue of their regional

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97 Manufacturers' Record, vol. 25, no. 8.
The Dwight Manufacturing Company produced two major lines of coarse goods, trademarked as “anchor” and “white star.” Anchor trademark of the Dwight Manufacturing Company (left). Entrance to the Dwight Manufacturing Company in Chicopee, Massachusetts with the Dwight star and anchor flanking the main mill gate (right). (Courtesy Edward Bellamy Memorial Association, Chicopee, Massachusetts).

location. Dwight wanted to bolster its share of the coarse goods market without having to abandon the millions of dollars invested in mills, manpower, and machinery in Chicopee. Dwight Company directors believed this could be achieved by expanding the company’s productive capacity to a location where it could pay its workers less and could operate without the restrictions imposed upon it in Massachusetts by striking workers and state regulations.

Actual and potential labor militancy at the Dwight mill, the restrictive legislation passed in the Commonwealth, due in large part to lobbying efforts of Massachusetts unions, and the production advantages that could be had in a new mill with updated machinery in the South were key factors facilitating the Dwight Company’s 1893 decision to open a southern branch factory. The Dwight move to build in the South illustrated, according to the Commercial Bulletin, the “disposition of manufacturers . . . to

99 Marvin Fischbaum argues that by World War I many northern textile mills that did not have southern branch plants had given up the manufacture of goods which competed directly with those made in the South unless “a trademark or superior finish” added a small amount to the value of the cloth on the market. See Fischbaum, “An Economic Analysis of the Southern Capture of the Cotton Textile Industry Progressing to 1910,” 107-108.

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make no important additions or extensions of their enterprises in Massachusetts, but to go outside her borders . . . where the labor agitator is not such a power, and where the manufacturers are not constantly harassed by new and nagging restrictions." Rejecting the ideas of switching to fine goods production, completely retooling its Chicopee mill, and actively seeking to lower hours in southern mills through national legislation, the Dwight Company was one of a handful of Massachusetts mills that chose not to try to undo the competitive advantages that production in the Piedmont South offered textile manufacturers, but to capitalize on them instead.

To the owners of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, the South was the land of low wages, laissez-faire, and high profits. For these industrialists, the South was a region overflowing with "docile" labor. It was a place where state and local governments were amenable to the will of manufacturers as a way to revive the economic pulse of a war-devastated region. The South was to be a means of escape for the Dwight Company from the regulations forced on them by the state and from the demands of organized workers in their mills and in the halls of the legislature. After the General Assembly of Massachusetts passed an act in February of 1894 allowing the Dwight Manufacturing Company to increase its capital stock and to "carry on the business of manufacturing cotton and woolen goods in any part of the United States of America," the question for the Dwight Company was not if it would build a new mill in the South, but exactly where.101 By the winter of 1894, the Dwight Company had decided that its new mill would be located in Alabama.

100 Commercial Bulletin, 28 September 1894.
101 From Acts and Resolves of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in Registration Statements, Dwight Manufacturing Company, Industrial #3, Miscellaneous Corporate Items. Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard University, Boston, MA.
CHAPTER III

“A MODEL MANUFACTURING TOWN:” THE DWIGHT MANUFACTURING COMPANY MOVES TO ALABAMA CITY

“No nation ever became wealthy by raising the raw material and then exchanging it for the manufactured article,” wrote William Gregg of South Carolina in 1844, “The manufacturing people always have the advantage.”¹ Three years after Boston investors established the Dwight Manufacturing Company in Chicopee, Massachusetts, Gregg was one of a small number of southerners calling for broad regional industrialization of the South. Throughout the antebellum South, however, industrialization occurred only to the extent that it served the interests of the region’s slave-based agricultural economy. Railroads, iron works, and cotton, grist, and saw mills served as offshoots of the southern plantation. Most investments in antebellum southern industry were directly related to fluctuations in the cotton market. When cotton prices were high, land and slaves were the outlets for surplus capital. Some manufactories operated in southern cities and were scattered throughout the countryside by the 1820s and 1830s, but the downward spiral of cotton prices in the 1840s caused many in the South to reconsider the issue of pursuing regional industrialization, especially the development of an indigenous textile industry, within the context of overall southern economic diversification. Industrial boosters like William Gregg argued that expanding the South’s manufacturing capacity would help

break the region’s dependence on the North for basic manufactured goods. At times of low crop prices, moreover, investment in manufactories would yield higher returns than those made in cotton cultivation.

Although proponents of southern industrialization received a great deal of press during the 1840s and early 1850s, according to historian Randall Miller, the commitment made by wealthy planters and merchants to the development of southern industry during these years was limited as economic boosterism was “a child of the agricultural depression.”

Because planters and wealthy merchants tied to King Cotton held the capital resources necessary to underwrite any meaningful manufacturing pursuits, southern industry remained small and localized. Once cotton prices rebounded in the 1850s, investments returned to land and slaves.

The first fully integrated cotton textile mill in the state of Alabama began operations in 1832. During the antebellum “cotton mill boom” of the 1840s, two more mills were constructed in the state. By 1860, the cotton manufacturing industry was the second largest industrial employer in Alabama. When the Civil War began, Alabama had fourteen cotton mills, over half of which were spinning mills with few or no looms. Only six of Alabama’s mills were factories that carried on the entire process of textile production from raw cotton to unfinished cloth. As was the case in all southern states, Alabama’s textile industry did not reach a size or levels of managerial and technical maturity achieved in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states during the antebellum period. In 1860, when the Dwight Manufacturing Company alone was capitalized at $1.2

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million and employed 1,600 workers, cotton mills in the entire state of Alabama represented $1.3 million in invested capital and had a textile workforce numbering just slightly over 1,300. Through the 1870s and into the first decades of the early twentieth century, however, Alabama experienced a “mini-industrial revolution,” within which the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s mobile capital played an important part.4

“Be it known I am no enthusiast, nor am I a citizen of Gadsden or even Alabama,” a “traveling man” informed the readers of the Manufacturers’ Record in 1887. “Accident located some towns, but nature located Gadsden. I . . . can state within the bounds of absolute truth that I have visited more than twenty States and at least 1,200 incorporated towns; yet I have never seen iron, coal, timber, . . . river transportation, health, food, water and topographical beauty combined in one range of landscape before I came here.”5 Sentiments similar to those of the “traveling man” could be read in myriad forms, in hundreds of newspapers and pamphlets, about scores of towns and localities throughout Alabama beginning in the 1880s. In published materials and in the halls of the state legislature, Alabama, like other states of the Piedmont South during the 1880s and 1890s, embarked on an increasingly aggressive booster campaign meant to facilitate industrialization within its boarders. Eager to attract investments in textiles, mining, and metals manufacturing which could jumpstart a statewide economic reconstruction, state legislators and local civic groups worked in tandem to create an image of Alabama as a

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5 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 12, no. 17.
place where natural resources abounded, invested money would bear fruitful returns, and where entrepreneurs would not be harassed by state regulations.

During the 1886-1887 session, Alabama state representatives passed legislation intended to advertise the state to would-be investors. Although an attempt to establish a state industrial and immigration bureau failed in 1884, state sanctioned action “to encourage immigration and investment of capital in the State of Alabama” became law in February of 1887. The statute appropriated $2,000 to purchase the copywrite of Dr. Benjamin Franklin Riley’s text, *Alabama as it Is; or The Immigrant’s and Capitalist’s Guide Book to Alabama*, as well as an additional $1,500 to publish and distribute 5,000 copies of the book. Originally published in 1887, *Alabama as it Is* was written, according to Dr. Riley, to describe each county in the state and “whatever facilities they possess for future development” in order to “meet a demand which has long existed” for information about Alabama’s resources “written in the language common to the people.” The book became the state endorsed instrument intended to not only to exhibit the diversity of and potentialities for Alabama’s natural resources, but also to demonstrate why these resources placed Alabama “in advance of any other State of the American Union.” The goal was to show why one should invest in Alabama but, more importantly, why one should choose it over other southern states.

In *Alabama Like It Is*, B. F. Riley divided the state into four sections and systematically analyzed county-by-county data on each. The text included information

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on the date of the county’s formation, its populations in 1870 and 1880, the racial composition of the population, land area and prices, the number of acres of government-owned land, the number of acres of tilled land, the products grown, the types of minerals and timbers available, as well as the waterways, chief towns, and the finished and projected railroads, schools, and churches in each.\textsuperscript{9} Riley, speaking directly to possible northern investors, also made the point of mentioning that “Northern people will meet with no jealousies or indignities. The animosities of the war are all buried and forgotten . . . man is esteemed according to his moral, intellectual and industrial worth—not for his political sentiments.”\textsuperscript{10} Alabama as it Is, however, was much more than an assurance for skittish Yankee capitalists or a simple compendium of facts and figures. It was also, indirectly, a summary of the overall goals and objectives of Alabama’s post-Civil War boosters.

B. F. Riley’s study illustrated how establishing industries which could manufacture the state’s cotton crop and its timber and mineral resources would generate economic growth, but in it the author also made a point of stressing the fact that Alabama was a predominantly agricultural state and that long-term prosperity also depended on using the state’s agricultural resources to grow more than cotton. “[W]hat would minerals be to a region without agriculture?” he queried, “Every interest is more or less dependent upon agriculture, and must rise or fall with the increase or decrease of the products of the field.”\textsuperscript{11} Riley noted that industrialization would break the South’s economic dependence on cotton by facilitating diversified agriculture. The growth of industrial and urban populations, he argued, would create a need for foodstuffs. This

\textsuperscript{9} Riley, Alabama as it Is, 11-215.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 119.
would generate local markets for those who raised livestock and farmers who grew fruits, vegetables, and grains. The amount of land used to grow cotton, therefore, would decrease, and an increase in the market value of cotton would be the result. This process, Riley informed his readers, “will lead to the restoration of our agricultural system under a new regime.”

In line with New South spokesmen throughout Alabama and the entire region, Riley embraced diversified farming as an absolute necessity and as the means through which those who worked the land, in addition to those who found jobs in industry, would share in the promise of a reborn South.

Promotional campaigns conducted at the local level supplied information and reflected objectives similar to those found in *Alabama as it Is*. In towns and cities throughout Alabama, leading community members produced a body of booster literature targeting outside investors, especially northern manufacturers. Civic boosters, like those in Gadsden, used editorials and advertisements in regional and national newspapers to inform readers of the “advantages to capital” found within a particular locale. Beginning in 1887, full-page advertisements placed by “young progressive towns of Alabama” appeared in the *Manufacturers’ Record*, each listing the reasons why intelligent and astute entrepreneurs should invest and build manufacturing establishments there.

Community boosters also prepared and published brochures and detailed pamphlets meant to generate interest in their towns. The “Citizens of Gadsden” distributed a pamphlet intended to make Gadsden and the surrounding countryside stand

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out as having the greatest potential for industrial and agricultural development of any area in Alabama. The publication called attention to the transportation networks available and the advantages to be had by investors who wanted easy access to markets that three lines of railroad (the Anniston and Cincinnati, the Tennessee and Coosa Valley, and the Rome and Decatur), with an additional two “assured” offered. It also advertised the town’s location on the Coosa River as another transportation bonus for potential investors. Furthermore, the boosters pointed out, Gadsden was located only a short fifty-four miles northeast of Birmingham and ninety-two miles south of Chattanooga. The pamphlet touted the iron, clay, stone, and coal deposits along the Coosa, the stands of timber on nearby Lookout Mountain, the fertile farmland nearby where farmers grew “some of the best grades of cotton and which will grow anything,” a healthful location, mild climate, good schools, and numerous churches. Howard Gardner Nichols of the Dwight Manufacturing Company would later note that the transportation facilities, the city’s proximity to major urban areas, the grades of cotton available from farms in the valley, and the “fairly good” sources of coal located in the Gadsden area helped persuade the company to choose adjacent Alabama City as the location for their southern cotton textile mill.

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14 It is unclear whether or not the founders of Alabama City, incorporated in 1891 and located on the outskirts of Gadsden, ever published a pamphlet like that distributed by the civic boosters in Gadsden. The author, therefore, offers the Gadsden pamphlet as an example of the booster literature describing the Alabama City vicinity.


16 Gadsden Times-News, 3 May 1895. David Carlton disputes the validity of the “bring the cotton mills to the cotton fields” booster rhetoric, stressing the economic reasons, including access to transportation, why southern textile mills often located in and around towns. See Carlton, Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 46-49. For an additional analysis of economic motives behind the location of southern textile mills, see Wright, Old South, New South, 43-44.
Through the 1870s and 1880s, much of the industrial growth in Alabama occurred in the iron industry. Due to losses sustained during the Civil War and in addition to the fact that, unlike elsewhere in the Piedmont South, local industrialists were more likely to invest in iron and mineral concerns rather than cotton manufacture, the textile industry in Alabama was virtually the same size in 1880 as it had been in 1860.\(^\text{17}\) "The iron industries and kindred interests have attracted so much attention in Alabama for several years that the business men of that State have failed to appreciate the importance of cotton manufacturing," wrote Richard Edmonds in 1887. Citing figures showing that Alabama had 90,834 spindles compared to Georgia with 390,288 spindles, North Carolina with an estimated 275,000 spindles, and South Carolina with over 225,000 spindles, he continued, "These mills, almost without exception, appear to be enjoying great prosperity . . . . They are not only making money for their owners but they are furnishing employment for thousands of hands . . . and also creating a home demand for diversified agricultural products." Alabama, Edmonds argued, "needs to build such mills."\(^\text{18}\)

Many in Alabama came to agree with Edmonds and through the late 1880s and 1890s, state legislators and civic boosters increasingly focused their attention on attracting outside investments to aid in the expansion of the state’s cotton manufacturing industry.\(^\text{19}\) It would take more than the favorable climate, natural resources, and railroad

\(^{17}\) In 1860 the Alabama textile industry consisted of fourteen mills with a total capitalization $1.3 million and 1,312 workers. By 1880 Alabama had sixteen mills representing $1.3 million in invested capital and 1,400 workers. Perry, “Middle-Class Townsmen and Northern Capital,” 57-61; Taft, Organizing Dixie, 3-4.

\(^{18}\) Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 12, no. 1.

\(^{19}\) Several historians point to the importance of agrarian protest movements, especially Populism, in pushing the members of Alabama’s legislature as well as wealthy planters, to encourage development of the textile industry during the 1890s as a means of relieving economic distress and diffusing tensions in the countryside. See Sheldon Hackney, Populism to Progressivism in Alabama (Princeton, NJ: Princeton
lines described in promotional literature, however, to persuade northern textile manufacturers that investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in the state of Alabama made good business sense. But in the 1890s, a confluence of events occurred which led some New England textile manufacturers, including the Dwight Manufacturing Company, to make the decision to establish southern branch factories there.

Poor business conditions, northern mill curtailments and closures, labor unrest, and state regulations, and mounting competition from southern mills, coupled with aggressive southern campaigns to attract northern investments, improved transportation networks, the availability of cheap and abundant southern labor, and inducements offered by the state government, facilitated a wave of New England textile investments in Alabama. According to Gavin Wright, the 1890s were “a demoralizing time in New England” and the first time before the 1920s in which northern investments in southern textiles were significant.\(^{20}\) Between 1890 and the turn of the century, Alabama had the largest increase in textile capacity of any state in the South, and northern investments in establishing the state’s textile industry during these years were crucial. Non-southern entrepreneurs and corporations, as well as commission houses and machine manufacturers located in the North provided fifty-two percent of the capital spent on new textile mills being built in the state between 1880 and 1895, and seventy-one percent of the capital between 1895 and 1900.\(^{21}\) New England firms constructed three branch

\(^{20}\) Wright, \textit{Old South, New South}, 135.

\(^{21}\) Perry, “Middle-Class Townsmen and Northern Capital,” 1, 140-148, 188.
factories in the state by 1900, representing over 100,000 spindles and a total
capitalization of more than $4 million.\textsuperscript{22}

As in the case of the publication and distribution of promotional literature in the
1880s, inducements at both the state and local levels worked in concert to secure the
investment of textile dollars, particularly northern ones, in Alabama. Tax exemptions for
new textile investments were one kind of state-sponsored incentive offered there. In
February 1893, the Alabama legislature enacted a law “for the purposes of encouraging
the building and operating of factories for the spinning of thread, yarns, and the weaving
of cloth and other fabrics of cotton and wool in the State.” This statute authorized
counties, cities and towns to free property, buildings, and machinery used in textile
manufacturing from taxation for five years.\textsuperscript{23} The following year, Governor Thomas
Jones called on the state legislature to enact additional exemptions which would allow
investors to “act with confidence,” noting that lenient tax laws elsewhere in the South
caused a significant amount of capital “to go to neighboring states, when otherwise they
would come to Alabama.”\textsuperscript{24} No additional legislative action on the taxation matter
occurred until February 1897 when the General Assembly passed a law exempting from
state taxation “any person, copartnership [sic], association of individuals, or corporations
incorporated under the laws of the State of Alabama” that within five years of the passage

\textsuperscript{22} In addition to the Dwight Manufacturing Company, other Massachusetts firms operating in
Alabama included the American Net and Twine Company of East Cambridge, which opened a branch
factory in Anniston in 1896 with 5,000 spindles, and the Merrimack Manufacturing Company of Lowell
locating its branch mill on the outskirts of Huntsville in 1899. By 1902 the Merrimack represented $2.5
million in investments and 100,000 spindles. It was Alabama’s largest branch plant. The Avondale Mills,
Indian Head Mill, Lowe Mill, and Barker Cotton Mill were established in Alabama by northern investors
but were not branch plants of existing firms. See Marvin Fishbaum, “An Economic Analysis of the
Southern Capture of the Cotton Textile Industry Progressing to 1910” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University,
1965), 106-107; Perry, “Middle-Class Townsmen and Northern Capital,” 165-168; 182-188. Articles
discussing these movements of Massachusetts textile money to Alabama can be found in Manufacturers’
Record, vol. 35, no. 19 and vol. 37, no. 1.

\textsuperscript{23} Acts of . . . Alabama, 1892-1893.

\textsuperscript{24} Journals of . . . Alabama, 1894-1895.
of the law “invest, expend, lay out and pay at least fifty thousand dollars in money in the erection, building and construction of cotton mills or factories” in the state. The legislature amended this law in March 1901, extending the five-year provision to ten years as long as the construction or expansion of the factory took place by February 1902.²⁵

Although the Dwight Manufacturing Company began construction on its Alabama mill two years prior to the passage of the 1897 tax exemption act, R. A. Mitchell, Agent of the Alabama City Mill, assured Dwight Treasurer J. Howard Nichols that expansions of the mill and new construction on mill property which began in 1898 would not be subject to state taxation. Despite the fact that the Alabama City mill was incorporated under the laws of Massachusetts and not of Alabama, “It is clearly the policy of our state to encourage cotton manufacturing enterprises” the Agent wrote, adding that there “would be no difficulty . . . in having the Legislature include our mill in the benefits of this statute.”²⁶ The 1897 law, had played no part in Dwight’s earlier decision to build its branch factory in Alabama, but the 1893 statute allowing counties, towns, and cities to forego taxing textile manufactories was important. Acting on the prerogatives allowed them by the state, Etowah County and Alabama City officials assured the Dwight Company that they would not tax a new mill constructed there. In the opinion of a “prominent citizen,” the tax exemption granted by Etowah County was “one of the best

²⁵ Acts of . . . Alabama, 1896-1897; 1901. See also Hackney, Populism to Progressivism in Alabama, 138-139. For an in-depth discussion of tax exemptions granted to industries in New England from the eighteenth century through the Civil War and their similarities to those passed in southern states after the war see Fischbaum, “An Economic Analysis of the Southern Capture of the Cotton Textile Industry,” 134-168.

²⁶ R. A. Mitchell, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 4 August 1898, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-2. Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard University, Boston, MA. See also Mitchell to Nichols, 27 June 1898, 17 December 1898, 25 January 1898, and 3 April 1899.
things that ever happened in the county.”27 The Alabama City Land and Development Company also gave land to Dwight free of charge, which, according to Howard Gardner Nichols, son of Treasurer J. Howard Nichols was, “liberal and . . . of course a large consideration.” The combination of free land and no taxes “had much to do” with the Dwight Manufacturing Company locating in Alabama.28

The issue of state labor regulation in Alabama played an even more important role in Dwight’s decision-making about constructing its branch factory there. Massachusetts had a long history of using state legislation as a way to keep children from working in manufacturing establishments, especially in textile mills, and to limit working hours. In 1887, Alabama became the first southern state to enact an hours regulation and child labor law which prohibited the “compelling” of women to work for more than eight hours in “mechanical and manufacturing businesses,” established an eight-hour day for children under the age of fourteen employed “in any factory, workshop or other place used for mechanical or manufacturing purposes,” and made illegal the employment of children under the age of fifteen “in a coal or iron mine, or mines.” Punishment for violation of this law was a fine of five to fifteen dollars. The language of the law, nevertheless, was open to interpretation and no enforcement mechanisms were written into the statute.29

The 1887 Alabama hours law passed principally because of the small number of cotton manufacturers in Alabama and due to the presence of the Knights of Labor in the

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28 Ibid., 3 May 1895. The Alabama legislature issued a charter of incorporation for the Alabama City Land and Development Company in 1891 to the same people and at the same time that Alabama City received its charter. According to Robert Eugene Perry, land development companies were important in bringing northern capital to Alabama as they were a means through which local citizens could pool resources to pay for advertising and promotional publications and to buy and sell large tracts of land to outside investors. See Perry, “Middle-Class Townsmen and Northern Capital,” 134-140.
In 1887, there were relatively few textile manufacturers and no significant lobbying bloc of textile interests in Alabama able to marshal their resources to prevent the enactment of regulatory legislation. On the other hand, between 1882 and 1883, the Knights of Labor entered Alabama, creating a strong base of support in urban areas like Mobile, Birmingham, and Montgomery, where the union drew its members primarily from the iron industry and skilled trades. By 1888, the Knights had an estimated 112 local assemblies throughout the South, many including or exclusively made up of textile workers in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. As the Knights did in New England, they lobbied in southern statehouses for the creation of bureaus of labor, hours restriction laws, child labor acts, and provisions for the inspection of factories.

The calls for reform made by the Knights of Labor in Alabama reached the ears of State Senator Daniel Smith and Representative T. G. Bush who introduced hours restriction bills into their respective houses. Both men represented Mobile, which had active Knights of Labor assemblies made up of workers from the skilled trades and construction. While legislators enacted the law to encourage industrial investment through the purchase and distribution of B. F. Riley’s *Alabama as it Is* during the same session, the overwhelming majority of the state’s legislators represented non-urban or non-manufacturing districts, and they viewed the potential passage of the regulatory law with indifference. The probable lack of enforcement mechanisms, moreover, calmed the fears of most owners of manufacturing and mining interests. The Mobile-sponsored

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hours bill which, in amended form, would become the 1887 law, passed the Alabama Senate by a vote of 19 to 1 and passed the House without a single opposing vote. The only dissenting vote came from the representative from Elmore County, home to a textile mill since 1866. In February 1889, the state representatives of Elmore County and the representatives Autauga County, where a cotton mill was established in 1887, successfully pushed legislation through both houses which repealed the 1887 hours law as it related to Elmore and Autuga but nowhere else in the state.

The strength of the Knights of Labor in the South began to wane by 1888 and although pockets of organized workers based mostly in urban areas existed, the region’s textile mills were virtually union free for a decade. It was during this lull in union activity that Alabama stepped-up its cotton mill campaign. When the Dwight Manufacturing Company announced in 1894 that it would build a southern mill, Treasurer J. Howard Nichols "received numerous letters pressing the claims and setting forth the advantages of various sites." One of these letters came from Alabama City businessmen Robert Kyle and James Elliot, and Gadsden Mayor R. A. Mitchell. In addition to the advantages of railroad lines, quality cotton, and readily available labor that the three men brought to the attention of Nichols, the possibilities of tax breaks and free

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32 McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 44-45; Davidson, *Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States*, 18-19; Debbie Pendleton, “New Deal Labor Policy and Alabama Textile Unionism” (M.A. thesis, Auburn University, 1988), 2-3. Pendleton notes that the first recorded labor organization in Alabama was the Mobile Typographical Society founded in 1836 and that Mobile, Alabama’s largest city before the Civil War, had a strong union presence which included printers, blacksmiths, and carpenters. Members of these trades were important in establishing Knights of Labor assemblies there in the early 1880s.


land in Alabama City piqued the interest of the Dwight Company’s owners. After a visit to the town, J. Howard Nichols urged the directors of the Dwight Company to seriously consider locating its new mill there.\textsuperscript{36}

The Dwight Company’s corporate officials, however, perceived Alabama’s hours restriction law, regardless of the laxity in its enforcement, as a major deterrent. What the owners of Dwight wanted, even more so than free land and tax incentives, was the guarantee that it would be located in a state where, unlike in Massachusetts, there would be no “interference” with its management in determining who would work and for how long. “Labor agitation was directly the cause which induced us to come south,” noted Howard Gardner Nichols, “For the past ten years labor agitators . . . have been weaving a web of oppressive laws around cotton manufacturing industries in Massachusetts till they are almost strangled in its meshes. People here, unacquainted with professional agitation little realize how dangerous it is to the prosperity and welfare of a state.”\textsuperscript{37}

Why, then, did the Dwight Company build its branch factory in Alabama, the only southern state with recently passed hours restriction legislation rather than North Carolina, South Carolina, or Georgia? Dwight officials dismissed North Carolina as an option because they believed there were too many mills already located there and not enough cotton grown locally to supply them all. They rejected South Carolina because of “oppressive taxation.” The decision came down to one between Alabama and Georgia where a Dwight official admitted, “the difference in their advantages was not great.”\textsuperscript{38}


\textsuperscript{37} Gadsden Times-News, 3 May 1895.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
What swayed the Dwight Company's decision to choose Alabama over Georgia were actions taken by the Alabama legislature in 1894.

In November 1894, House Representative Milner of the legislative district covering Gadsden and Alabama City, introduced a bill "on request" from Governor William Oates, that would repeal the 1887 hours law "so far as the same related to Etowah county." With approval from the governor, the legislature went one step further and on 5 December 1894, passed a law repealing the 1887 statute entirely. 39 "Alabama had been the first state to regulate child labor in 1887," child labor reformer Irene Ashby would later remark, "and the first to repeal restrictions . . . at the urging of Dwight mill officials from Chicopee, Massachusetts." 40 Governor Oates supported this change in state law, seeing it as a guarantee that the Dwight Company would begin building a new mill immediately in Alabama City. He accepted statewide nullification of the law, moreover, to show other New England textile concerns that Alabama was not only willing to pass legislation in the interest of capital invested in textile manufacturing but that it would also revoke old laws and prevent the passage of new ones that were not. After the repeal of the 1887 statute, Howard Gardner Nichols was confident that he and the Dwight Company had the ear of the Governor and the support of a pro-business legislature, acknowledging that the nullification of the hours law proved to the Dwight Company "that Alabama was governed in a common sense and economical way, and that we had less to fear here from hostile legislation . . . than in any other southern state." 41


40 Quoted in Flynt, Poor But Proud, 270.

41 Gadsden Times-News, 3 May 1895. R. A. Mitchell, the mayor of Gadsden in 1894, later referred to a trip he and Howard Gardner Nichols took to Montgomery in 1894 during which Mitchell introduced Nichols to "my friends, Governor [Tomas] Jones and Governor [William] Oates." Jones was
The citizens of Alabama City and Gadsden looked upon the construction of the Dwight mill not just as a corporate endeavor but as evidence of the “great progressive movement for this region of Alabama,” a “conspicuous signal of the faith of capital that is keen and cautions to the last degree to the advantages of the cotton belt for the manufacture of cotton.” The Dwight mill was, in short, evidence of the success of local boosters and their state representatives in bringing large-scale manufacturing to the area. The community, however, perceived this triumph not as an end point, but as a beginning.

Even while the Dwight mills were under construction, an editorial in the *Gadsden Times-News* reminded readers that “Gadsden wants another one before the Dwight mills are completed and she is going to make the effort.” The local newspaper continued an industrialization campaign within its pages through the turn of the century, trying to keep locals’ interests focused on attracting investments of textile dollars. The paper’s editor used the Dwight mill as an example of the good that industry did for the area. It “has been a blessing to the people of this county, opening up a market all through the year for any produce our farmers have to sell,” he proclaimed, “and . . . infused new and fresh life into all the commercial and business interests of the county, causing existing enterprises to enlarge their capacities and creating a demand for other industries.” The message conveyed was that industrial development and local and regional progress went hand-in-hand and that since Dwight had helped to create prosperity, more manufacturing growth

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Governor from 1890-1894 and Oates served in the position from 1894-1896. Although the author has not been able to locate a source explicitly stating it, it is presumed that a topic of conversation between Nichols, Mitchell, and Oates during this 1894 trip was the repeal of the hours restriction and child labor law. For the reference to the Montgomery trip, see *In Memoriam, Howard Gardner Nichols*, 66.

42 *Gadsden-Times News*, 7 January 1896.
would presumably create more prosperity. As late as 1903, the *Times-News* called upon Gadsden’s “commercial club, business men and property owners” to “distribute a few more cotton factories about Gadsden.” The Gadsden-Alabama City area would, by 1910, be home to numerous medium and large industrial concerns, but the Dwight Company would own the only cotton textile mill in either town.

Howard Gardner Nichols spearheaded the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s construction and initial operation of its Alabama City branch plant and mill village. After graduating from Harvard University in 1893 Nichols decided to “connect himself with the cotton manufacturing interest in which his father was engaged,” and became acquainted with the operation and management of the textile industry through informal training received at the Great Falls Manufacturing Company in Somersworth, New Hampshire and, starting in the spring of 1894, at the Dwight Company’s Chicopee, Massachusetts mill. Nichols was integral in choosing the location for Dwight’s southern branch, visiting Alabama and Georgia with his father, Dwight Treasurer J. Howard Nichols, in 1893 and returning to Alabama in September 1894 to secure land and water rights for the company’s possible move there. After the company made its decision to locate in Alabama City, T. Jefferson Coolidge, President of the Dwight Manufacturing Company made Howard Gardner Nichols Agent of the Alabama City operations.

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45 *Gadsden Times-News*, 10 April 1903.

46 Steven Howard, “Alabama City’s Industrial Roots Run Deep,” *Gadsden Times*, 20 June 1988. The largest of these industrial concerns included the Birmingham Slag Company, Alabama City Lumber and Supply Company, Jefferson Lumber Company, the Etowah Packing Company, the Gadsden Car Works of the Southern Railroad, and the Alabama Steel and Wire Company which was organized by Ohio capitalists in 1905, sold in 1913 and renamed the Gulf States Steel Company, then acquired by Republic Steel in 1937.
Agent, Nichols directed the construction of the mill complex and managed the company's southern production schedules when the Alabama City mill opened in February 1896.47

Work on the Dwight Manufacturing Company's Alabama City mill began in the spring of 1895. The initial capitalization for the southern mill was $1.2 million dollars.48 The main mill building measured 130 feet wide, 500 feet long and three stories high.

The Dwight Manufacturing Company's Alabama City mill, under construction during the summer of 1895. (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama).


The Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City mill, as seen across the water reservoir, spring 1896. (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama).

This building housed 27,000 spindles and 800 looms making it one of the largest textile mills in Alabama at that time. The Alabama City mill complex included a cotton warehouse, water reservoir holding five million gallons of water and covering two acres, a boiler house and engine rooms, and a brick smokestack 200 feet in height. The Dwight Company also constructed a mill village of 150 homes to house its initial workforce of 500 employees. The size of the Alabama City mill, however, paled in comparison to the Dwight mill in Chicopee, Massachusetts. When construction began on the southern branch, the Chicopee complex included seven mills, housed 130,000 spindles and 3,400
looms, and the Chicopee mill workforce numbered 1,600.\(^4^9\) The Dwight Company, nevertheless, planned to expand the Alabama City mill if it proved profitable. “We anticipate the surplus earnings of the Dwight Manufacturing Co. will very likely be expended here,” declared Agent Nichols, “and not in Massachusetts.”\(^5^0\)

The Alabama City mill showed a profit for the Dwight Manufacturing Company slightly over a year and a half after the start of production in February 1896, and it

\(^{4^9}\) Gadsden Times-News, 16 April 1895; Blue Book, 1895-1896, 47, 69. Updates about the progress of the construction of Dwight’s Alabama City mill appeared in Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 26, no. 24; vol. 26, no. 26; and vol. 28, no. 23.

\(^{5^0}\) Gadsden Times-News, 3 May 1895. After rebuilding mills 3 and 4 in 1871, mills 1 and 2 in 1882, and mills 5, 6, and 7 in 1889, the Dwight Company made no fundamental changes or additions to the buildings of its Chicopee mill complex for the next twenty years.
continued to do so in the following years.51 In December 1897, L. A. Aumann, Agent for the Dwight mills in Chicopee told Treasurer J. Howard Nichols that he was “pleased to see the showing” of the Alabama City mill, adding that he was “Very glad to see that we are not as badly off as some of the other [Massachusetts] Co[mpanies].”52 In his testimony before the Massachusetts Legislative Labor Committee, William Lovering, Treasurer of the Whittenton Mills of Taunton, Massachusetts referred to the Dwight Company’s ability to make profits during the depression years of the 1890s due to the fact that it had a branch plant in Alabama. “Southern mills opened by Northern capital, in several cases as ‘dependencies’ of Massachusetts corporations,” he pointed out, “earned dividends upon their capital stock during 1897, while the Northern ones failed to do so.”53 True to Howard Gardner Nichols’ prediction in 1895, the Dwight Company did not expand its operations in Chicopee for over a decade but it more than doubled the productive capacity of the Alabama City mill. By 1905, Dwight’s southern mill housed 1,800 looms and 60,000 spindles and employed 1,000 workers.54

While the citizens of the Gadsden area initially welcomed the Dwight Manufacturing Company to the area with open arms, company managers knew that a pro-business atmosphere which welcomed new industrial enterprises was one thing, but recruiting a workforce and keeping the goodwill of the townspeople was quite another.

51 Profits for the six months ending November 1897 were $32,123.15 for the Alabama City mill and $38,839.09 for the Chicopee mill; profits for the six months ending May 1898 for the Alabama City mill were $54,072.29 and $47,297.95 for the Chicopee mill; profits for the six months ending November 1898 for the Alabama City mill were $58,181.90 and $48,202.95 for the Chicopee mill. Journals, December 1891-November 1899, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, DB-9.
52 L. A. Aumann, Chicopee Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 28 December 1897, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MK-3.
Practicality led the Dwight Manufacturing Company to build homes in Alabama City that employees could rent from the company. In 1891, less than fifty people lived within the city limits of Alabama City. Construction of the Dwight-owned houses occurred, because “four houses represented the size of the territory . . . occupied by the Dwight Co.” when the company began the factory’s construction in 1895.\textsuperscript{55} There was nowhere nearby to accommodate the arrival of hundreds of mill workers and their families. Yet, in order to maintain favor within the locale, the Dwight Company needed not only to provide gainful employment and housing for the Coosa Valley’s “mountain farmers” who came to work in the mill but to attend to their “welfare” as well. To many residing in the Gadsden area, this welfare was not limited to “good wages” but also referred to the “social and intellectual welfare of the community at large.”\textsuperscript{56} The leading citizens of the community expected the Dwight Company to mold their operatives, who, by far, constituted the largest single population of industrial workers in the county, not only into efficient mill hands but also into “respectable” members of society. They wanted reassurance that their town would not be tainted by class strife and social demoralization.\textsuperscript{57}

The Dwight Manufacturing Company used a twofold strategy in its attempt to reassure the greater Gadsden community that they had nothing to fear when it came to the issue of class strife. First, the company represented itself in the local press as exceptional, one that, unlike most New England textile corporations, had a long history of labor peace. The Dwight Company fraudulently told the readers of the \textit{Gadsden Times-}\textit{News}, 16 April 1895.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Southern and Western Textile Excelsior}, 14 October 1899; Hoffman, “A Study of the United Textile Workers of America in a Cotton Mill in a Medium-Sized Southern Industrial City,” 64.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Gadsden Times-News}, 16 April 1895.

\textsuperscript{57} David Carlton discussed the efforts of southern industrial advocates to ally fears about disorder that could stem from concentrations of wage earners in \textit{Mill and Town in South Carolina}, 88-89.
News that any trepidation was unnecessary because labor-management conflict “does not cut much of a figure with us, for the Dwight Co., at least during the past twenty years, has never had a strike.” In addition to public pronouncements such as this, the Dwight Company constructed a “model mill village” in Alabama City. Often referred to by locals as “Dwight City,” the village became the centerpiece of an on-going public relations campaign with the residents of the greater Gadsden area. The Dwight Company touted Dwight City as a credible safety valve for the kind of class divisions and discord endemic throughout the industrialized North and West. Management contended that

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58 Gadsden Times-News, 3 May 1895.
Dwight City would endear the company to its workers as a benefactor, the provider not only of jobs and shelter, but also of recreation, education, and religion. Dwight City created the perception within the wider community that the Dwight Company was interested in more than profit, that "unlike most corporations it has a soul."\(^{59}\)

Because of his day-to-day presence in Alabama City and the greater Gadsden area, Howard Gardner Nichols, Agent of the mill, became the "face" of the Dwight Manufacturing Company there. Community members and his employees came to equate the Dwight Manufacturing Company and the offerings it provided in the mill village with him, not with an impersonal New England corporate entity. While the association of a single individual with a corporation was, and continues to be, a common phenomenon, it

\(^{59}\)Southern and Western Textile Excelsior, 14 May 1898. There is a vast amount of scholarship that analyzes the subjects of southern mill villages and paternalism. Much of the literature focuses on two broad questions. 1) What were the motivating factors behind the construction and maintenance of mill villages in the New South? 2) What was the nature of southern mill villages vis-à-vis managerial control and worker agency? Before the rise of the "new" labor history in the 1980s, the debate about southern mill villages focused on the issues of motives and the benevolence or malevolence of managerial control in the villages. For an interpretation representing the "benevolence" argument, see Broadus Mitchell, \textit{Rise of the Cotton Mills in the South} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1921). Mitchell viewed mill village paternalism as benign and stemming from a sense of noblesse oblige on the part of mill owners. According to Mitchell, workers embraced mill owners as compassionate benefactors. For an interpretation representing the "malevolence" argument see Wilbur J. Cash, \textit{Mind of the South} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1941). Cash viewed the mill village as a total institution, a New South version of the Old South plantation in which managerial control was absolute and worker agency effectively stifled. Melton Alonza McLaurin's \textit{Paternalism and Protest} (1971) was the first in the body of mill village paternalism scholarship which challenged the notion that southern mill workers passively accepted managerial authority and paternalism, whether benign or not, in southern mill villages. McLaurin documented the ways in which southern mill workers were willing and able to organize and challenge managerial authority and the ways in which the mill village was a tool of social control. For additional arguments that engage with the issue of worker agency within the context of paternalism and southern mill village culture see David Carlton, \textit{Mill and Town in South Carolina}; Douglas Flamming, \textit{Creating the Modern South}; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., \textit{Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Cathy McHugh, \textit{Mill Family: The Labor System in the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 1880-1915} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); I. A. Newby, \textit{Plain Folk in the New South}. In \textit{Old South, New South}, Gavin Wright views economic factors as the primary motivation in the creation of southern mill villages. For historiographic overviews see David Carlton, "Paternalism and Southern Textile Labor: A Historiographical Review," in Gary Fink and Merl Reed, eds., \textit{Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History} (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., "Afterword," in Hall, et. al. \textit{Like a Family} (2000 reprint); Robert Zieger, "Textile Workers and Historians," in Robert Zieger, ed., \textit{Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South} (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).
had special significance for the Dwight Company. The senior-most management of the Dwight Company arrived in the Gadsden area as outsiders; they were welcomed but were outsiders to the community nonetheless. This, coupled with the fact that the Agent of the mill was a New Englander, undoubtedly introduced an element of skepticism into the attitudes of some locals about the future of cordial relations with the owners of their new cotton mill. According to M. F. Foster of the New England Cotton Manufacturers’ Association, “The New England man when he went South often made himself generally obnoxious by telling the operatives and others how they did things up North.” Howard Gardner Nichols, however, quickly ingratiated himself to the community through his personal planning and direction of the construction of Dwight’s mill village. “Mr. Nichols’ Yankee notions,” quipped the editor of the local newspaper, coupled with “the sweet influences of his happy southern environments” guaranteed that the Dwight Company would “come to the front and be an exemplar of urban thrift and comeliness.” Using Dwight City as a tool, Nichols successfully cultivated an image of himself as a prudent businessman and as a community benefactor, as an enterprising northerner and a paternalistic southerner.

Historians have established that company paternalism was not something uniquely southern, even though southern mill village paternalism often distinguished itself by the degree of its personalism and noblesse oblige. While the Dwight Company

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60 This trend, as found in managerial relations at the turn of the century in North and South Carolina mills, is discussed in Hall, et al., Like a Family, 91-92.
63 In Creating the Modern South, 360-361, fn. 10, Douglas Flamming defined company paternalism, which he used interchangeably with corporate paternalism, industrial paternalism, and welfare capitalism, as “institutionalized company policies intended to extend non-wage benefits to workers, to create an identifiable corporate culture, or to regulate the living environment of the workers.” This is the
did not have an established system of corporate paternalism at its Chicopee mill, it did, however, utilize paternalism, in the form of the mill village at its Alabama City site, as an integral part of an overall corporate strategy. In a context of capital mobility, the Dwight Company embraced corporate paternalism at its Alabama City mill, not because there was something particularly “southern” about the nature of Dwight’s corporate practices or of its owners, but because it was a useful tool for labor recruitment, a means through which it hoped to maintain stable labor-management relations, and, most importantly, for maintaining positive community relations. These were all necessary elements in the successful operation of its southern branch plant, the profits of which were vital to sustaining the economic health of the entire company. Dwight City owed its existence, in large part, to the fact that it was fiscally prudent.

“I could not be happier,” Howard Gardner Nichols wrote to his sister in April 1896, “for it would not be possible to find an equally interesting and absorbing occupation.” Referring to his mill village, he continued, “It gives a chance for business and philanthropy . . . I shall not want to come away until my ideal is reached.”

Dwight’s village, within which Nichols served as Mayor and where he saw himself as

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64 This interpretation of motivating factors behind the use of company paternalism differs significantly from Douglas Flamming’s argument in *Creating a Modern South*, 121-124. Flamming posits that the Crown Mill village in Dalton, Georgia was initially constructed simply as a means to house Crown Mill employees. Only later, growing out of changing labor market conditions in the region, did the company embrace a system of corporate paternalism. I contend that paternalism was evident at Dwight’s Alabama City site from the very beginning of its southern operations within a context of capital mobility. The nexus of the Dwight Company’s corporate paternalism is found in the need to house workers and in the company’s strategy to cultivate positive community relations. See Flamming, 121-124.

65 Letter quoted in *In Memoriam, Howard Gardner Nichols*, 32.
both master and protector, would have “ample” public schools, a “handsome” church, a public library, and “cottages” for the operatives, each painted different colors and with garden spaces so that there would be an “absence of monotony that is often characteristic of the homes of operatives about cotton factories.” Nichols also banned concealed weapons and saloons from the village.66 His goal was to create “a model manufacturing town where not only the manufacture of cotton goods would be carried out in the most advanced manner but where the people would find work with pleasant surroundings in the day and comfort and rest in their homes at night.”67 Nichols, however, would not see the completion of his model village or the impact it would have on the lives of Dwight’s Alabama City operatives. On 20 May 1896, while supervising the installation of an electric generator at the mill, the scaffolding holding the generator collapsed, all of which fell on Nichols. After what appeared to be a successful surgery to repair his severe internal injuries, Nichols was taken to Atlanta to recuperate a week after the accident. He died, however, on 23 June 1896 at the age of twenty-five.68

“All Gadsden was thrown into a state of sorrow,” reported the Gadsden Times-News upon learning of Nichols’ death, as he “was a young man who had endeared himself to the people of this city . . . . Gadsden feels that she has lost one of her best and most honored citizens whose loss the city mourns.”69 The outpouring of emotion, which appeared in the pages of the local press after the death of Howard Gardner Nichols, illustrates how the civic leaders of Gadsden and Alabama City regarded Nichols as a

66 Gadsden Times-News, 7 January 1896.
69 Gadsden Times-News, 26 June 1896.
businessman and a person. Business leaders in the community regarded him “as a young man of high character, earnestness, and great capacity for affairs” while the Mayor of Gadsden remembered Nichols as “a leader in his chosen line of business . . . one of us.” To the business elite and political officials of the community, Nichols had proven himself. At the time of his death, he was not a stranger or a New Englander, he was one of them. He was an essential participant in the ongoing crusade to generate local and regional prosperity through industrial enterprises.

Public pronouncements about Howard Gardner Nichols’ death also provide a glimpse of the values held by the civic leaders of Gadsden and Alabama City, especially concerning what they saw as duties and responsibilities to those they envisioned below them in the social hierarchy. Reflecting their own sense of mission, noblesse oblige, and ideals of social order, these community members did not find the part that Nichols played in the repeal of the 1887 hours restriction law objectionable. They embraced the notion that an individual was responsible for improving one’s own station in life through hard work. The leading citizens of Gadsden found it acceptable for those who had achieved personal success, like Howard Gardner Nichols, to give help via moral platitudes and rigorous industrial discipline to those “below” them. It was, however, intolerable for the state to be an active participant in helping to regulate working conditions because this was interpreted as an infringement on a worker’s right of contract, the means through which the individual could negotiate to raise his or her own standards as he or she saw fit. “I believe the Lord called Gardner to the wonderful work he has achieved in the South,” wrote a friend of Nichols, “to be the helper of hundreds of toiling men . . . to manifest to them how rich, deep, and full an earthly life can be through earnest, faithful . . . work.”

70 Quoted in In Memoriam, Howard Gardner Nichols, 66. Italics added.
His efforts in Alabama City, wrote another, "far more revealed the Christ of divine love than the master of capital and the executor of plans for manufacture and money-making." Nichols was, in these views, a benevolent paternalist, a man who strove to improve the lives of those who came to live and labor in Dwight City. The civic elite of the Gadsden area did not question what they saw as their social and moral superiority to those who found employment in Dwight's Alabama City mill. They praised Nichols for the fact that he awakened "higher aspirations" in his workers and "taught them how to live." Community leaders mourned him because his death interrupted the work of "elevating...to a higher plane" the "thousand souls who looked to him as employer and protector."

In the years following Howard Gardner Nichols' death, mill officials at the Dwight Company's Alabama City mill continued expansion of his "model" village. "I feel like I want to see everything carried out like Gardner had planned," C. H. Moody, Superintendent of the Alabama City mill wrote to Nichols' father, "I am willing to work hard and long to see this mill become a grand success because he had so planned to have it." Commenting on a proposal to enlarge Dwight City and the mill in 1898, R. A. Mitchell noted, "I am glad because Gardner wished to increase the size of the mill." The Dwight mill village, and "the benefits Gardner planned for his help," according to

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71 In Memoriam, Howard Gardner Nichols, 45, 50.
72 Ibid., 57, 63-64. Extant sources do not reveal the opinions of Dwight's Alabama City workers toward Howard Gardner Nichols and life in Dwight City. Numerous studies, however, reject the notion that southern textile operatives at the turn of the century accepted company philanthropy unquestioningly and felt total deference toward their employers. These studies show that southern cotton mill workers often negotiated the bestowal and meaning of company philanthropy, using the system of mill village paternalism to their own ends. See Hall, et al., Like a Family; Newby, Plain Folk in the New South; Carlton, Mill and Town in South Carolina; Flamming, Creating the Modern South.
In 1999, the Etowah County Historical Society placed a historical marker on the property of the Howard Gardner Nichols Memorial Library describing Nichols as “Scholar, Engineer, Industrialist, Naturalist, Humanitarian.” The library is located at the corner of Winona Avenue and Coolidge Circle in Gadsden, Alabama. (Photograph by the author).

Mitchell, would “stand as a monument ... of which any man should feel proud.” In addition to the mill and four hundred houses for Dwight’s operatives, by 1910 the mill village included six stores, two school buildings, a church, the Howard Gardner Nichols Memorial Library, an emergency first-aid station, bowling alley, bathhouse, baseball field where the “Dwights” played home games, and a bandstand where the “R. A. Mitchell Brass Band” gave free weekly concerts.

Following Howard Gardner Nichols’ death, local newspapers and the textile industry press continued to extol the greatness of the village in Alabama City and the

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74 The Gadsden Daily Times-News published an article describing the Dwight mill village on 16 June 1906. The paper published photographs of the village on 12, 13, 14, 26, and 27 June 1906, and 7 July 1906.
beatifying influences of work and life in Dwight City on the company’s employees. After Nichols’ passing, however, Dwight’s Alabama City management showed less and less zeal for using the village as a tool of social uplift as he had envisioned. This modification reflected the differing personalities of Nichols and his successors as well as the fact that after Howard Gardner Nichols’ death, the senior managers at the Alabama City mill were native Alabamians with long-existing ties to the Gadsden area. These men were already well known and respected within the community. R. A. Mitchell, former mayor of Gadsden and Agent for the Alabama City mill beginning in 1897, for example, took a less personal approach to the administering of the mill village than did Nichols. In keeping with the idea that it was the individual’s duty to better oneself but with little of the sense of ministry Nichols expressed about his mill village duties, Mitchell explained that his strategy for “making the mill village attractive” was to encourage “the people to use their personal efforts to improve their condition.”  

Much of this change, however, also had to do with the evolution of the relationship between the Dwight Manufacturing Company and the community of the greater Gadsden area.

By the turn of the century, the Dwight Company no longer needed the Alabama City village as a tool to assuage community members’ fears about the problems that might arise from the existence of a new and large factory population in their midst. The necessity of using the mill village as a means of ingratiating the company to the community diminished each year that the Dwight Company ran a profitable manufacturing enterprise that was free from labor strife. Indeed, while the local press lauded the virtues of Howard Gardner Nichols and his personal interest in the care and

75 R. A. Mitchell, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 16 January 1897, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-1. Italics added.
betterment of the operatives who worked at the Dwight mill, within ten years of his death, the same newspaper praised R. A. Mitchell not for the munificence he bestowed on the operatives but for his “interest in the advancement of the business, the betterment of the village and the general growth and prosperity of the community.” Dwight’s management initially used Dwight City as a corporate tool meant to provide houses for its workforce while also facilitating good relations with the wider community. By 1898, however, Dwight’s mill village assumed a new significance for the company as a way to recruit and maintain a stable, experienced workforce.

From the beginning of the southern cotton mill boom in the 1880s until the late 1890s, white labor was readily available to managers of the region’s textile mills. At the end of the Civil War and through the remainder of the 1860s, demand for cotton was high, especially by the cotton textile mills of the Northeast, and southern cotton farmers received high prices for their crops. This would change when the numbers of farmers engaged in cotton cultivation steadily rose through the 1870s and 1880s, increasing the amount of the staple on the market and driving down prices. Nevertheless, cotton remained one of the few commodities southern farmers could raise to secure credit in the cash poor post-Civil War South. Cotton prices continued to fall steadily through the early 1890s. In 1894, cotton sold for five cents a pound when ten-cent prices were needed for farmers to breakeven. It would be a decade before cotton prices returned to the levels seen in the early 1880s.

Many mountain farmers of Alabama’s Coosa Valley, like small land-owning and tenant farmers throughout the Piedmont, were caught in a cycle of debt during these years.

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77 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 6; Flaming, Creating the Modern South, 27-29.
years. The Dwight Manufacturing Company began operations at its Alabama City branch plant at a point when working in nearby manufactories was a strategy that local farming families increasingly embraced as a means through which they might find escape from their economic woes. As late as December 1897, the textile industry press reported “4 and 5 cent cotton has run the small tenants off the farms, like rats leaving a sinking ship.” Exacerbated by the overall economic depression that lingered throughout the nation, “the result is that the cotton mills at North Alabama are glutted with help.”

Cotton prices rebounded by the turn of the century and, despite intermittent bad years, they remained stable at around ten cents a pound. Many potential mill workers continued to farm while some mill families returned to the land during these “fairly flush times” for cotton cultivation during the first two decades of the twentieth century. “The South needs operatives and needs them badly,” noted a 1905 report, “they have been forced to draw operatives from the farms but now that these farmers are returning to agriculture in considerable numbers, the scarcity is growing every day.” Although plentiful labor continued to be a selling point for boosters trying to secure investments of northern textile money, the reality was that the boom of southern textile mill building during the 1890s, the expansion of existing mills by the turn of the century, and the rebounding of cotton prices caused a labor crunch which, by 1900, forced southern mill owners to actively seek-out and recruit workers from as far as 250 miles away. The Dwight Manufacturing Company blended labor recruitment practices honed at its

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78 Southern and Western Textile Excelsior, 11 December 1897; Hall, et al., Like a Family, 3-13.
79 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 10; Flaming, Creating the Modern South, 108-109.
Massachusetts mill with the strategies used by managers of textile mills throughout the South to find operatives for the Alabama City mill.

The regional practice of not hiring black workers to fill manufacturing positions in textile mills further aggravated the southern labor supply problem at the turn of the century. Even before a shortage of available workers became a serious issue at Dwight’s southern mill, Alabama City Agent O. B. Tilton made clear to the company’s corporate officers in Boston that they should not even consider hiring black operatives. According to Tilton, doing so would only “cause problems” by conflicting with “certain ‘color ideas’ liable to be brought out when colored help are employed permanently in a mill.” The trade press depicted white southerners’ potential reactions to the widespread use of black labor in southern textile mills as “a fire . . . that all the waters in the Mississippi will never be able to put out.” Tilton acknowledged “the disgust of any northern man when he first comes into contact with these features,” but would not be swayed from his opinion. The Dwight Company followed regional patterns and only hired white operatives. Even when labor shortages at Dwight became problematic during the first decade of the twentieth century, the company, wanting to avoid conflict with its workers and the wider community, did not hire black operatives even though they could have been, according to the New England Cotton Manufacturers’ Association, “an important factor in solving the labor question” for mills throughout the Piedmont South.

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82 The Dwight Company employed a very small number of African-Americans at its Alabama City mill. Tilton referred to “periodical washing” of the mill that was done by black employees but not needing to “arrange any special accommodations” within the mill village for black workers because “the number we employ here will be limited to one or two families.” O. B. Tilton, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 31 October 1896 and 1 August 1896, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-1; Southern and Western Textile Excelsior, 12 February 1898.

83 NECMA Transactions, Annual Meeting, 1900, 171.
Although the Dwight Manufacturing Company did not employ African-Americans as operatives at its Alabama City mill, nearly all of the men who constructed the mill between 1895 and 1896, pictured above on a lunch break, were black. (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama).

The practice of “stealing help,” once referred to by the trade press as “about the worst evil existing among the cotton mills of the South” became a much maligned but also much used strategy by managers seeking to recruit white workers for their mills.84 The Dwight Manufacturing Company was both participant and victim of the practice of enticing help from competing mills. With the goal of not only finding workers but acquiring trained operatives, as early as the spring of 1896, a labor agent for the Dwight Company’s Alabama City mill attempted to recruit 450 operatives from those on strike at

84 *Southern and Western Textile Excelsior*, 1 April 1899. The use of the term “stealing” in describing the enticement of labor from one mill to another, implies a sense of company ownership over mill operatives.
the Eagle and Phenix Mills located across the state boarder in Columbus, Georgia. The agent, F. C. Foy, was marginally successful and the Dwight Company paid the transportation costs for at least 100 operatives to Alabama City. Labor shortages periodically beset textile mills in New England as well, leading some corporations, including the Dwight Manufacturing Company, to employ labor recruiters to find workers in other New England mill towns. The Dwight Company also paid transportation costs for the workers it brought to Chicopee. Company policy for the Chicopee mill, and presumably for the Alabama City mill too, was for the operatives to repay the company for the expenses it incurred in bringing them and their families to the mill.

R. A. Mitchell found himself "constantly annoyed" by the efforts made by competing mills to steal help from the Alabama City mill, especially those of the Avondale Mill in Birmingham, which took "the heads of departments in our mill" and provided "transportation to our people whenever they can get them to move." Preventing the Avondale Mill and other mills from doing this was of particular interest to the managers of the Dwight Company. Reflective of the amount of control it exerted within Alabama City, the company was one of several southern mills that kept "an officer on the premises who has the full power to arrest any person found 'tampering' with the

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85 The incident was reported in the Atlanta Constitution. See Newby, Plain Folk in the New South, 102.


87 R. A. Mitchell, Alabama City Agent to Edward P. Nichols, Assistant Treasurer, 5 June 1898, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-2.
help." Mill towns throughout the South, moreover, passed laws banning the enticement of labor and imposing stiff penalties on those convicted of breaking them. When J. M. Howard of Meridian, Mississippi attempted to convince workers at the Alabama City mill to leave the employ of the Dwight Company in 1906, he was arrested, fined one hundred dollars, and sent to the city chain gang to work off his charges. The treatment of labor agents like Howard was meant to ensure that “one such experience is sufficient to deter others from following in the same footsteps.” By 1911, Alabama, as was the case in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, had a state law requiring agents who solicited laborers for employment to be licensed. The cost to procure a license in Alabama was $500 for each county in which the labor agent intended to work. Alabama City charged an extra $100 fee for any labor agent who wished to be licensed there.

In addition to the labor shortages that southern textile mill management dealt with beginning in the late 1890s, they also faced the problem of the “roving disposition” of southern mill operatives. Many Piedmont cotton mill workers frequently left a mill to make a brief return to the land or quit in search of higher wages, better housing, and improved working conditions elsewhere. In Alabama City, there was “a systematic exodus . . . in the summertime,” according to R. A. Mitchell, as “the mill population in this section seem very much given to changing base frequently.” By autumn, Mitchell

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88 Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, *Cotton Manufactures in Massachusetts and the Southern States*, 55. Douglas Flamming noted that 1905-1914 were the years of the severest labor shortages in the textile South before World War I. See Flamming, *Creating the Modern South*, 108.


answered “on an average of ten to twenty letters a week from people” who wanted work at the Dwight Company. Quitting a mill was an effective means for southern textile workers to show disapproval of their current living or working situation. In the absence of union organization, protesting with one’s feet was a viable strategy of resistance.

The workforce at the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City mill, in keeping with the employment pattern that dominated southern textiles, consisted overwhelmingly not only of white but also of native-born southerners. But, unlike most southern textile companies, Dwight recruited and hired immigrant workers. Few immigrants made southern mill villages their destinations upon arrival in the United States. The low wages paid in southern mills offered little monetary incentive to foreign-born workers to locate in the Piedmont. Ethnic and familial networks throughout the industrialized Northeast and West, furthermore, served as channels that often directed immigrants into particular towns and industries there. The Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor found that of the 156 workers who arrived in the United States in 1904 seeking work in the textile industry, the destination of one of them was Georgia with the remaining 155 going to Massachusetts. The Dwight Company, however, used its Chicopee mill as a conduit to bring immigrant labor to its southern plant.

In August 1906, the Gadsden-Times News reported the arrival of twenty-two Greeks in Alabama City, “brought here to work in the cotton mills.” Gadsden had Polish,

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91 R. A. Mitchell, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 19 August 1898 and 21 November 1898, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-2
92 The Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Labor: Wage Earners in the Cotton Textile Industry (1911) estimated that twenty-five to thirty percent of southern textile workers were “itinerant.” Quoted in Southern Textile Bulletin, 14 September 1911. Hall, et al., in Like a Family, 107, cited mill estimates that placed the “floating population” of all Piedmont textile mill workers at twenty to forty percent. On moving as a resistance strategy for southern textile workers see Newby, Plain Folk in the New South, 172-176; Hall, et al., 105-109.
93 Wright, Old South, New South, 74-77; Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor, Cotton Manufactures in Massachusetts and the Southern States, 50.
German, Italian, and Mexican workers “scattered among the industrial plants,” so the community was accustomed to immigrant workers living in the area. The appearance of immigrant textile operatives, however, was “something that has never happened before . . . something extraordinary.”94 Historians have noted the reticence of southern mill owners to hire immigrant workers because of the potentially negative reaction from native operatives about working with foreign labor, but this was not the case with the Dwight operatives at Alabama City. No organized walkouts and no mass exodus of factory hands occurred at the mill when the Greek workers arrived.95 Although the Dwight Company exerted a high level of influence over its operatives and their lives in Alabama City, the town was not a completely isolated or insular community because of its location on the outskirts of an established industrial city. Employees in other Gadsden area industries accepted the practice of employing native-born and immigrant labor together, which appears to have had an impact on how Dwight's southern operatives reacted to the introduction of a small number of Greek workers at their mill. For the Dwight Company, having mills in both Massachusetts and Alabama proved an advantage in the operation of its southern branch, giving it the flexibility to tap into an additional labor market. It could obtain workers from recruiting networks it used for its Chicopee mills when southern labor shortages became especially acute.96

94 Gadsden Daily Times-News, 13 August 1906. This importation of labor was in violation of the federal Foran Act. Passed in 1885, the Foran Act established penalties for employers who brought labor to the U.S. under the expectation that the workers would repay transportation costs to the company through their employment there.
95 See Hall, et al., Like a Family, 109-110; Flamming, Creating the Modern South, 97.
96 The U.S. District Attorney brought a case against the Dwight Manufacturing Company, alleging a violation of federal contract labor law. The suit charged the Dwight Company with illegally importing a total of ninety-seven Greeks from Turkey to work in their Alabama City and Chicopee mills. If found guilty, the company would have had to pay fines of $97,000; $1,000 for each of the ninety-seven counts against them. The company settled the suit out of court in June of 1914 for $50,000. Gadsden Daily Times-News, 21 March 1912; Springfield (MA) Republican, 22 May 1914 and 23 June 1914.
From the beginning of its operations in Alabama City, however, the company rejected the idea of hiring workers for the southern mill who had experience working at its Chicopee facility. While the company transported newly arrived immigrants to Alabama City they would not bring workers who were accustomed to the shorter hours worked in the Massachusetts mills. The Superintendent of the Alabama City mill admitted that “northern men would be better,” but the reality was that the Dwight Company “would have to pay them considerably more” than southerners or immigrants with no work history in New England mills. Skilled New England textile workers also had a long history of union affiliation. By 1903, the city of Chicopee had textile unions representing an estimated 2,000 mulespinners, loomfixers, weavers, carders, slasher-tenders, nappers, and drawing-in hands. In addition to the twenty-two Greek immigrants that Dwight brought to the United States to work in its Alabama City Mill in 1906, the company also transported Greek workers to its Chicopee mill to “take the places of the striking Poles” there. Dwight did not want the labor organizations and activism found in New England that it moved its capital to escape, to migrate to its southern branch if experienced workers came from Chicopee to Alabama City. Dwight management wanted “nothing of this kind” as it saw unionization as something that would “seriously retard Cotton Mill progress,” threaten their managerial prerogatives at the mill, and might disrupt Alabama’s laissez-faire, pro-business status quo.

It was within this context of ongoing labor recruitment for the Alabama City mill that the Dwight Company began to use Dwight City as a means of attracting and

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98 *Springfield (MA) Republican*, 3 May 1903 and 2 May 1906.
maintaining its southern workforce. "A mill manager wonders why the best class of operatives will not stay, while other mills have no trouble keeping them," observed the editor of the *Southern and Western Textile Excelsior*, "We cannot expect our people to live contented in hovels. . . . A hundred dollars spent on the mill village every few years . . . will prove a profitable investment."\(^{100}\) The message to the owners of southern textile mills was that a poorly kept mill village contributed to discontent among one's workforce and labor turnover. This, in turn, created a day-to-day shortage of operatives that meant idle spindles and looms. Additionally, constantly having to train new workers and retrain those from other mills was a time-consuming and costly proposition. With an eye on the bottom line, the Dwight Company tried to create the perception that work and life in Dwight City was the best of any mill village in the South.

The Dwight Company hired W. T. McCord, a Gadsden area judge, to aid in the labor recruitment for the Alabama City mill. Charged with seeking "the most promising prospective employees," McCord regularly traveled through the rural sections around Gadsden trying to attract workers to Dwight City. One of McCord's tried and true methods to inform locals about Alabama City was to initiate a marble game and "inspire listeners with stories about Alabama City, Dwight, and the future of the textile industry." Dwight village was a key selling point described by McCord as "a modern . . . housing development built by the company."\(^{101}\)

Around 1905, the Dwight Manufacturing Company also published *Alabama City: Its Location and the Advantages it Offers the Workingman*. The brochure was very similar to the booster literature published by local civic groups during the 1880s in their

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\(^{100}\) *Southern and Western Textile Excelsior*, 4 May 1901.
\(^{101}\) *Gadsden Times*, "84-Year-Old Dwight Mills Coming Down," 3 June 1979 in Gadsden Industries (Textiles) Vertical File, Gadsden Public Library.
A recently constructed company-owned home in Dwight City, described as “elegant and attractive . . . renting for one dollar per room per month.” (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama).

attempts to attract investments. The purpose of the booklet, according to the company, was to show that “The Dwight Manufacturing Company pays the best wages, has the best mill village, a splendid mill, and everything for the convenience and comfort of its employees.” The author of the pamphlet noted that Dwight City’s houses were “elegant and attractive . . . renting for one dollar per room per month,” wages were “paid in cash,” wood and coal were available “at lowest current prices,” the climate was “crisp, invigorating, and health giving,” and schools, library and recreational facilities were second to none. Prospective workers were guaranteed that the mill had “the best machinery obtainable.” They “would find employment . . . pleasant” because of the
“latest construction” of the mill buildings, the constant supply of “free ice water in the mill” and because “department heads are competent and reasonable men.”102

The pamphlet, presumably, was a successful labor recruitment tool as the Dwight Company published a brochure similar to Alabama City for its Chicopee mill around 1915. Chicopee, Massachusetts: A Description of Working Conditions informed potential employees that Chicopee was located within a short trolley ride from Springfield and Holyoke, and was a town with “well-paved and sewered streets,” a “well-organized Police and Fire Department,” a “model” free public library, public playgrounds, schools “unequalled in the State,” and “many handsome churches” where “every one can worship in his or her own way with his or her own country folks.” The

"Comfortable . . . frame houses" owned by the Dwight Manufacturing Company in Chicopee, Massachusetts on “Dwight Terrace,” a hillside overlooking the mill complex. The majority of the Dwight Company houses were brick row houses located across the street from the mill. (Courtesy Edward Bellamy Memorial Association, Chicopee, Massachusetts).


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pamphlet boasted that employment at the Dwight Manufacturing Company meant a workweek of only fifty-four hours with a “half-holiday” on Saturday afternoons, and work in mills of “the very latest style of construction,” looms “of the latest designs,” free medical care at the company dispensary, and “comfortable brick and frame houses” located near the mill.\textsuperscript{103}

The reality of life in the employ of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, nevertheless, was often very different than that depicted in its promotional literature. The Alabama City labor recruitment pamphlet, in particular, did not tell interested readers that the Dwight Company dominated the village and expected its employees to conform to standards which the company determined were necessary for “right thinking and right living.”\textsuperscript{104} The company banned the sale of alcohol and gambling from the town and sponsored recreational activities not for the workers’ enjoyment but with the intention “to provide for them before any mischief can be introduced by outside influences.” With a focus on shaping the next generation of Dwight operatives, the company also hired the teacher and contributed liberally to the maintenance of the city school. The Dwight Company paid the salaries of the church ministers, sponsored lyceum lecture series, and determined what books and newspapers would be allowed at the library and reading room so that its employees would hear and read company-friendly messages.\textsuperscript{105} Dwight also made sure that men associated with company management were in charge of Alabama City’s government. When a group of Dwight workers attempted to organize an opposition ticket in the local elections of 1899, R. A. Mitchell warned them that the...


\textsuperscript{104} Gadsden Daily Times-News, 16 June 1906.

\textsuperscript{105} O. B. Tilton, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 1 and 8 August 1896, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-1.
“local representatives of the company” as well as the corporate officers in Boston were “bitterly opposed” to their endeavor. Bearing out American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers’ observation that “A corporation who controls the stomachs of its working men comes mighty near to controlling their votes,” R. A. Mitchell squelched the opposition by “letting the advocates go.”106 In Dwight City, the company attempted to rein-in its Alabama City workforce both inside of the mill and out. This was

The Dwight Manufacturing Company’s cotton textile mill and village in Alabama City, ca. 1900. (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama.)

something Dwight managers had had limited success doing at its Chicopee mill.

The Alabama City mill village was crucially important for the Dwight Manufacturing Company as it faced the challenges of successfully starting and profitably operating its new southern mill. It initially helped forge positive relations between the community and the company. It evolved into a tool to attract and maintain a steady, well-trained workforce through promises of favorable working and living conditions, with the company expecting loyal service from its help in return. Dwight City provided the company with a means of keeping workers from participating in activities, such as political dissent or union organizing, that might upset Alabama City’s company-determined status quo. Maintaining such managerial control became a keenly discussed issue within southern textiles during the first decade of the twentieth century when progressive reformers and organized labor began to assail the institution of the southern mill village and the family labor system that characterized employment within the industry. The Dwight Company built its branch plant in Alabama specifically because worker militancy and state regulations did not impose restrictions on its production schedules or infringe upon potential profits, and it would engage in a protracted battle to make certain that it did not lose the advantages it built the Alabama City mill to gain.
CHAPTER IV

“BEST NOT TO GIVE NOTICE THAT WE ARE WORKING . . . SMALL HELP:”
CAPITAL MOBILITY, UNIONIZATION, AND THE ANTI-CHILD LABOR
CAMPAIGN IN ALABAMA

“There have been a number of good families applied to us for work . . . and we
have made a practice not to turn away any first class family who wished to come here,”
O. B. Tilton, the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City Agent wrote to
Dwight Treasurer J. Howard Nichols. “We have made it a point to employ such settled
families,” Tilton added, “as we know from experience would make . . . good mill
hands.”1 As was the case with their operations in Chicopee, the Dwight Company hired
entire families to work in various capacities in their Alabama City mill. Unlike in
Massachusetts, however, in Alabama no state laws mandated minimum ages for the
hiring of children. Managers of the Dwight Company in Alabama City, therefore, could
and did employ children who, oftentimes, were under ten years old. Whether officially
on the payroll or simply listed as “helpers” to parents or older siblings, child textile
operatives working in the Dwight mills in Alabama and in manufactories throughout the
South was a key issue that turn-of-the-century labor unions and, eventually, middle-class
reformers, sought to regulate through state legislation. In the debates that ensued over
state child labor regulation, manufacturers, state politicians, unionists, and reformers

1 O. B. Tilton, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 10 October 1896, Dwight
Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-1. Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard University,
Boston, MA.
praised and maligned the textile mill village, the family labor system, unionization, and capital mobility. Alabama industrialists fought to keep the “advantages” that the manufacturing of cotton cloth in the South offered them. New England textile unionists, meanwhile, called for the organization of southern operatives, and in concert with middle-class reformers, looked to the state to alter Alabama’s laissez-faire status quo.

Throughout the 1890s, skilled New England textile operatives, affiliated with the region’s craft unions, sought ways through which they could effectively meet the challenges presented by southern competition. In 1890, with the organization of all textile workers in one union on a national scale as their objective, Lowell mulespinners, weavers, loomfixers, and carders formed the National Union of Textile Workers. The NUTW received a charter from the American Federation of Labor in 1891. The NUTW realized that the strength of New England labor unions and the continued advancement of labor standards in northern textile mills were inexorably tied to the conditions of work that prevailed throughout the southern textile industry. “Wages are low and hours long in the South. They were continually told in Massachusetts their wages must conform,” mulespinner Robert Howard told AFL convention delegates in 1895. Seeking AFL funds for a southern organizing campaign he added, “No more progress can be made in New England until the Southern situation is improved.”

The purpose of the NUTW, therefore, was to raise southern conditions up to northern standards before northern conditions declined to match southern norms. Organizational infighting and a preference for local autonomy, however, led numerous New England craft unions to withdraw from

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the NUTW in the mid and late 1890s. During 1896 and 1897, the process of organizing southern textile unions was slow, constantly short of money, and hampered by a lack of support from the New England craft locals that had funds in their treasuries and experienced organizers within their ranks. Between 1898 and 1901, nevertheless, the NUTW spearheaded an organizing drive throughout the Piedmont South and in doing so, belied the proclamations made by southern industrial boosters that southern textile operatives were "docile." These cotton mill workers organized strikes and walkouts to protest wages and working conditions, challenging managerial control in textile villages throughout the region.⁴

The southern industry press urged manufacturers to resist the National Union of Textile Workers' organizing campaign. "Trade unionism does not flourish in the Southern states. The soil has never proven a fertile one . . . . Now comes news that the New England textile union federation are about to send missionaries through the Southern states," one editor noted, "Their work fell on stony ground before, will it again?"⁴ The NUTW did successfully organize locals in the four leading southern textile states of North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama with an estimated 5,000 members in these states, representing about six percent of southern textile operatives, at

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⁴ Southern and Western Textile Excelsior, 12 November 1898.
the height of its strength in the fall of 1900.\textsuperscript{5} But, the answer to the question posed by the editor of the *Southern and Western Textile Excelsior* would prove to be a definitive “no,” as southern manufacturer resistance and anti-union sentiment in textile towns throughout the region were strong.

Southern textile mill managers balked at any attempts made by employees and labor union organizers to interfere with their prerogatives to set wages and working hours as they deemed fit. To thwart NUTW attempts to organize union locals throughout the South, mill agents and department supervisors regularly discharged union members and sympathizers, and capitalized on the control they could exert within company owned villages by threatening to replace white operatives with black workers, locking-out unions, and intimidating, evicting from company housing, and blacklisting union sympathizers. Unless this state of affairs could be altered, argued one NUTW organizer, “we will Never be able to Organise [sic] the South.”\textsuperscript{6} Indeed, lacking the skilled membership that gave strength to New England craft unions, especially those of mulespinners and loomfixers, the overwhelmingly unskilled southern operatives who joined NUTW-led strikes found that they had little bargaining power and few financial resources to sustain protracted walkouts. The NUTW, without any substantial support from textile unions north of the Mason-Dixon Line, went on to oversee large-scale, but ultimately unsuccessful strikes in the Horse Creek Valley of South Carolina, in Danville, 

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\textsuperscript{6} G. B. McCrackan to Sadie Middleton, Augusta Federation of Labor Secretary, 14 April 1900, Mss117a, Series 11, File A, Box 47, Folder 21, American Federation of Labor Papers, 1888-1955, National (International) Union of Textile Workers. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.
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Virginia, Durham and Alamance, North Carolina, and in Atlanta, Augusta, and Columbus, Georgia.  

The issue of stronger inter-regional cooperation surfaced again in 1900 among the NUTW unionists of the South and unions representing New England weavers, mulespinners, carders, and loomfixers, which had consolidated themselves into the American Federation of Textile Operatives in the spring of 1900. Fearing that an ongoing conflict between the southern-based NUTW and northern-based AFTO would undermine the strength of all unionized textile operatives, the American Federation of Labor’s national leadership urged the two unions to amalgamate into one. Throughout 1900 and 1901, the two textile unions entered into protracted negotiations with one another and the AFL’s executive committee to establish the terms under which they could merge. Despite unresolved questions of union jurisdiction, dues assessments, and whether the NUTW or the AFTO would dominate the leadership of the proposed mutual organization, at a November 1901 conference held in Washington, D.C., they officially joined their constituencies and formed the United Textile Workers of America. The NUTW, in the wake of its southern defeats, hoped to use the newly created UTWA as a vehicle through which it could finally have the finances and experienced organizers necessary to support a successful southern unionization drive. This, NUTW leadership anticipated, would create a union base in the Piedmont necessary to establish national

standards of hours, wages, ages, and working conditions throughout the U.S. textile industry.\footnote{AFL, \textit{Convention Proceedings}, 1899, 107-108; Prince Greene, NUTW General Secretary to Samuel Gompers, AFL President, 31 December 1900; Greene to Frank Morrison, AFL Secretary, 12 February 1901 and 15 February 1901; and James Duncan, NUTW Vice-President to Gompers, 23 April 1901, 26 April 1901, and 17 May 1901, Mss117a, Series 11, File A, Box 47, Folder 21, American Federation of Labor Papers, 1888-1955, National (International) Union of Textile Workers; McLaurin, \textit{Paternalism and Protest}, 178-185; Brooks, “The United Textile Workers of America,” 41-50; Daniel, \textit{Culture of Misfortune}, 17-18.}

Aggressive inter-region cooperation within the UTWA, however, did not occur. After the failure of a bitterly fought strike in Augusta, Georgia in 1902 which was led by the UTWA and financed in large part by northern locals, the UTWA’s mostly New England constituency looked at any future organizing drive in the South as a waste of time and money. The UTWA leadership, based in Fall River, Massachusetts, decided to pursue the strategy of building strong locals of skilled operatives in the textile centers of the Northeast before engaging in any broad organizing campaign of unskilled southern operatives. “In order to help them at all,” argued UTWA Secretary Albert Hibbert, “we must proceed with some assurance of permanency by securing the cream of the skilled labor.”\footnote{Albert Hibbert, UTWA Secretary to Samuel Gompers, AFL President, 24 March 1903, in Stuart Kaufman, et al., \textit{The Samuel Gompers Papers}, vol. 6 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 119. From its founding, the organizing strategy of the AFL focused on craft workers and the power they could exert within the workplace by virtue of their skills. This approach meant that the AFL would largely ignore the vast numbers of unskilled workers in U.S. industries. See David Brody, \textit{Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Montgomery, \textit{The Fall of the House of Labor}; Ileen DeVault, “‘To Sit Among Men:’ Skill, Gender, and Craft Unionism in the Early American Federation of Labor,” in Eric Arnesen, Julie Greene, and Bruce Laurie, eds., \textit{Labor}}

The full-scale retreat of northern unionists from future participation in southern organizing drives meant that southern unionists would have to carry-on alone and without the vital financial support of the New England locals. The UTWA sent union Vice-President, John Golden, through the textile districts of the Piedmont South in 1903 to survey conditions and assess the potential for successful organizing there. Upon
Golden’s return, discussions about the feasibility of organizing southern locals continued at UTWA annual conventions, but the union would not send an organizer to the South for nearly a decade.\textsuperscript{10} When placed within the context of ongoing employer hostility and the regional rhetoric that tied southern industrial development to the maintenance of a union-free status quo, regional nearsightedness of New England textile unions and their withdrawal of support from southern organizing efforts, guaranteed that southern textile workers would, in both the short and long term, remain unorganized.

The policy of organizing only skilled workers and shoring up established craft union affiliates meant that the membership of the UTWA would remain small and centered in the northeast instead of in the South, the site of the most dynamic growth in the textile industry. The focus of New England textile craft unions remained local and, at best intra-regional. Unionized weavers at the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Chicopee mill, for example, protested the hiring of Portuguese workers in 1903, believing that “it was an attempt to drive them out through the importation of cheaper workingmen,” but did not link the strength of their union to the competition they faced from the company’s Alabama City operatives who were paid significantly less and who labored longer hours than their Massachusetts counterparts.\textsuperscript{11}

Technological changes also undermined the ability of craft unions, especially the mulespinners, to represent a large number of workers in any mill, north or south. The steady stream of French-Canadian, Polish, Portuguese, and Greek workers into New England mill towns, and the impoverished farming families moving into mill villages


\textsuperscript{10} Brooks, “The United Textile Workers of America,” 131-137; Mitchell, \textit{Textile Unionism and the South}, 31-32.
throughout the Piedmont South, provided textile mill managers with the majority of the
operatives they needed to produce coarse and medium-count cotton goods. The large
numbers of unskilled and semiskilled immigrants and women who dominated this textile
workforce often proved themselves militant unionists during times of labor unrest in
individual mills, still they found the UTWA unresponsive to them and remained largely
outside the purview of formal organizational activities during times of labor peace.

Throughout the first decade of its existence, the UTWA claimed as members only one to
two percent of the textile workers nationwide.\(^{12}\)

\(^{11}\) Springfield (MA) Republican, 28 September 1903.

\(^{12}\) Robert Brooks and Cletus Daniel estimated that UTWA membership in 1902 represented one
and one-half percent of textile workers in the United States. Daniel also cited figures indicating that after
1902 UTWA membership remained under two percent until World War I. See Brooks, “The United
Textile Workers of America,” 52-53; and Daniel, Culture of Misfortune, 21. On the UTWA’s craft focus
and the operatives that the union did not aggressively organize, see Brooks, 52-81; Daniel, 19-21; Mitchell,
Textile Unionism and the South, 1-5; Montgomery, The Fall of the House of Labor, 169-170. Historians
have cited the decentralized nature of the textile industry, the prevalence of craft organization and
conservatism, the low skill levels required of operatives, and the large proportion of immigrants, women,
and children in the textile workforce as factors that undermined the possibility of successful unionization in
the textile industry. The question of why there were so few unions among textile workers in the South has
largely dominated the historiography of southern labor and southern textile history. In answering this
question, numerous historians have built their arguments on a foundation of southern exceptionalism,
emphasizing the part that paternalism in mill villages played in undermining unionization and labor strikes,
and focusing on differences in the “character” of southern workers versus their northern counterparts. In
these analyses, southern mill village paternalism served alternately as a surrogate for the benefits that
unions could have provided workers and as a tool used by management to crush any movement for union
organization, while operatives’ rural backgrounds, a fierce sense of individualism, pervasive racism, and
hostility to outside influences undercut any possibility of successful unionization. Beginning with the rise
of the “new” labor history in the 1980s, scholars have complicated the paradigm of southern
exceptionalism or have done away with it completely by asking new questions, by expanding their analyses
of operatives’ militancy beyond their participation and membership in national unions, and by looking at
the history of southern unionism through multiple lenses of class, race, and gender. These historians,
likewise, have found that southern mill village paternalism was not simply a system dominated entirely by
mill owners but instead, was characterized by ongoing labor-management negotiations. For the best recent
treatment of the historiography of southern unionism, see Bryan Simon, “Rethinking Why There Are So
Few Unions in the South” Georgia Historical Quarterly 81 (Summer 1997): 465-484. See also Jacquelyn
(1987; reprint Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Robert Zieger, “Textile Workers and
Historians,” in Robert Zieger, ed., Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South (Knoxville: University
of Tennessee Press, 1991); Zieger in Gary Fink and Merl Reed, eds., Race, Class, and Community in
Southern Labor History (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 3-8. Additionally, when
answering the questions of why southern textile workers historically have not joined unions in large
numbers and why northern attempts to organize them have historically failed, it is important to remember,
as seen herein, the short and long-term implications that the withdrawal of northern unionists’ support from
Because New England textile unionists concerned themselves with the issue of organizing southern workers primarily because of the competitive disadvantage in which they found themselves through competition with lower-waged southern labor, the failed attempts to organize the southern portion of the industry led many unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor to try to equalize regional conditions, instead, through the enactment of protective labor laws in the South. In Alabama, organized labor was the most outspoken critic of the December 1894 nullification of the statute, originally passed in 1887, that had prohibited the employment of children under fourteen years old in any factory or manufacturing business for more than sixty hours per week. The argument supporting the repeal of the act, forwarded by pro-business politicians and manufacturers, was that doing so would entice industrial concerns like the Dwight Manufacturing Company to build textile mills in the state, which would then provide gainful employment for poor farming families. “I was . . . horrified by this outrageous piece of legislation,” Samuel Gompers wrote to Jere Dennis, publisher of Alabama’s Labor Advocate, “. . . this crime that had been committed by that legislature in sacrificing young and innocent children to the greed and rapacity of the profit mongers.”

The reversal of the 1887 Alabama child labor statute became a rallying cry for AFL unionists in their attempt to lead a successful lobbying campaign for the passage of state age and hours laws. So too did critiques of the family labor system on which the southern organizing efforts had. At the turn-of-the-century, this created a situation in which southern textile workers were left without the financial and moral support necessary for them to have had a meaningful chance of overcoming the challenges they faced from the anti-union status quo that dominated the region.


textile industry was based and the role of the southern mill village in perpetuating it become focal points for unionists seeking legislation that would regulate the employment of children. "I find little, pale, pinched faced children laboring long hours," noted Prince Greene of the National Union of Textile Workers about his travels through southern mill towns in the 1890s, "... every member of a family is compelled to give the first and best end of their lives to the manufacturer."\(^{15}\) For Greene and his fellow unionists, child labor was not only a social abomination but also an economic one. "A man cannot earn high wages from it," a Massachusetts resident remarked about work in the Dwight Manufacturing Company's mills, "his wife must work to support the family, and at an early age the children must join the ranks."\(^{16}\) Competition from low-cost child labor, the AFL argued, drove down the wages for adult textile operatives, and the low wages paid to adult mill workers meant that most families who were reliant on the textile industry for their income had to send their children to work at a young age to contribute to the family economy.\(^{17}\)

According to textile manufacturers throughout the Piedmont South, however, children were not always attentive or cost-effective operatives. The Dwight Manufacturing Company instituted a plan at its Alabama City mill by 1897 of "weeding out the very young." Agent R. A. Mitchell noted that seventeen of the one hundred and sixty-two employees in the Alabama City mill spinning department in May of 1897 were ten and under. Mitchell instructed overseers "to take no one under ten if it can be

\(^{15}\) American Federationist, vol. 6, no. 6.

\(^{16}\) Springfield (MA) Republican, 1 August 1897.

avoided," yet Dwight management tolerated the inefficiencies of young operatives because the employment of children provided the company a means through which they could train and maintain their workforce. 18 “Many points of training must extend through more than one generation,” Alabama City Agent O. B. Tilton reminded Dwight’s corporate officers, “before we can reproduce neat and skilfull [sic] employees.” Mill

Employees, including several children, who worked in the carding room at the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City mill, ca. 1896. The majority of children employed by Dwight at the Alabama City mill during the 1890s and early 1900s worked in the spinning department. (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama).

18 R. A. Mitchell, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 11 May 1897, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-1. On the use of the family labor system as a way create a stable core of operatives and to perpetuate a mill’s workforce, see McHugh, Mill Family, especially 14-16, 24-29, 47-48; Douglas Flamming, Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 98-102; Hall, et al., Like a Family, 56-57.
managers hoped that when these children matured, they would remain in the employ of
the company, reside and marry within the company-owned village, and rear the next
generation of children who would enter the Dwight mill as their parents had before
them.\textsuperscript{19}

Southern industrial boosters and textile manufacturers alike, therefore, saw the
family labor system and the training of textile operatives from childhood as a foundation
for the long-term stability of mill workforces and for the industry as a whole. Any
tries made by unionists to challenge the family labor system or the employment of
children, mill owners and boosters reasoned, had to be resisted. "The South, in
maintaining its advantages as a manufacturer . . . in handling its labor question
judiciously should seek to reduce to the minimum the influence of the politician in labor
legislation," asserted Richard Edmonds of the \textit{Manufacturers' Record}, "He is a curse . . .
. He should be suppressed as far as possible, and along with him . . . the agitator from
outside, who seeks to save himself by creating artificial conditions in the South."\textsuperscript{20}

Organized labor would face the same kind of opposition it encountered in its attempts to
unionize southern textile workers as it tried to promote and secure labor legislation in the
states of the Piedmont South. Seen as agents of northern mills, attempting to hamper the
success of the southern textile industry, labor organizers and their critique of the family
labor system and the overall depression of wages that child labor caused, were not
welcomed in mill villages or in southern statehouses. "[T]here is more consideration
shown and liberty given to the operatives in the South than is given to their Northern

\textsuperscript{19} O. B. Tilton, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 31 October 1896, Dwight
Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-1.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Manufacturers' Record}, vol. 38, no. 20.
brothers and sisters. The operatives of the South are contented,” opined the southern textile industry press, “... we ask that our Northern friends attend to their own state of affairs and we will attend to ours.”

Alabama unionists, battling the concerted opposition of textile manufacturers, lacked the strong base of organized workers found in heavily industrialized states like Massachusetts. During the late 1890s, they were thus unable to secure the reenactment of an hours and age law for those working in textile mills throughout the state. A bill entered into the Alabama House of Representatives in November 1896 to prohibit the employment of “females or girl children under the age of fifteen years” in cotton or woolen mills, received scant attention from the public, press, and politicians, and died in committee. A similar bill entered into the Senate in 1897 met the same fate, as did a series of bills proposing to outlaw the employment of children under thirteen years old in mechanical, mercantile, or manufacturing establishments. “There is a decided opposition on the part of manufacturers in the South to any restrictive labor legislation,” the Massachusetts-based Arkwright Club observed, “and the alertness with which they combine to oppose and discourage it is worthy of attention.”

During the 1898-1899 session, labor-friendly politicians introduced more bills into the Alabama legislature, intended to regulate the employment and working hours of children. While Alabama unionists championed them, the state’s textile manufacturers, including representatives of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, aggressively fought to

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21 Southern and Western Textile Excelsior, 29 February 1896.
23 Arkwright Club, Report of the Committee on Southern Competition, 1897, 3.
prevent their passage. Alabama House representative Luther Jones, a trade unionist from Lee County, introduced bills during the session to limit the hours worked and establish legal ages for employment in the state’s manufacturing and mining industries. In conjunction with Jones’ hours and ages bill in the House, Representative J. A. Hurst from Etowah County, simultaneously introduced a Senate bill to prohibit the employment of children under twelve years old and to set ten hours as the maximum workday in the state’s mines and factories. Despite strong opposition, this bill passed the Senate.\textsuperscript{24}

Confident that the bill would ultimately be defeated, R. A. Mitchell, nonetheless, reported to Dwight Company corporate officers that he expected manufacturers to encounter a “real fight.”\textsuperscript{25}

Mill managers, representing ten cotton manufactories in Alabama and one in Georgia, appointed a two-person committee, of which Dwight’s R. A. Mitchell was one member, to “handle the matter” of the proposed hours and ages restrictions before the Alabama House Committee on Immigration and Labor. Mitchell discovered that the “young man named Jones” who introduced the legislation had recently conducted an investigation of the conditions of textile mills in Alabama and Georgia, “that he was in company with Mr. Sam[uel]l Ross of New Bedford . . . studying the labor question,” and that he had been in conversation with a man “named Howard, an eastern man and . . . was very intimate with a Mr. Stanley . . . the head of the labor organization in Birmingham.” Concluding that Representative Jones was “a district organizer of some labor union” or “perhaps an anarchist in embryo,” Mitchell reported to the Alabama manufacturers for

\textsuperscript{24} Journals of . . . Alabama, 1898-1899. See also, Elizabeth Davidson, \textit{Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States}, 23.

\textsuperscript{25} R. A. Mitchell, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 5 December 1898, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-2.
whom he lobbied at the statehouse that unflinching opposition to all proposed regulatory legislation was necessary in order to halt “agitation of this character.”

The “man named Howard” referred to by R. A. Mitchell was Robert Howard, the mulespinner from Fall River, Massachusetts who the AFL appointed as an organizer in 1896 for its southern textile unionization campaign. “Mr. Stanley” was a member of and paid lobbyist for the Birmingham Trades Council, sent to Montgomery to campaign for the pending child labor legislation. Indeed, organized labor in Alabama, in line with the overall goals of AFL textile unionists of stopping the depression of adult wages by child workers and creating an equality of standards between workers in the Northeast and those in the South, sought to cultivate support within the statehouse and among the wider public for the pending labor bills in the Alabama legislature. Samuel Gompers reminded Alabama unionists that “We have a friend and union member in the Alabama Legislature by the name of Luther C. Jones . . . . and it is possible that some good may be accomplished, if you will do your duty,” urging them to “adopt resolutions and send them to members of the Legislature,” a tactic that had worked well in campaigns to enact protective legislation in the Northeast. The state’s labor press, meanwhile, couched the proposed child labor legislation in terms of “human advancement,” imploring politicians and the public to “do justice for the poor, helpless children who are not able to help themselves.”

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28 Labor Advocate, 28 January 1899.
Between December 1898 and February 1899, however, the Alabama textile lobby succeeded in preventing any action from being taken in the state House of Representatives on the Jones hours and age bill. R. A. Mitchell noted that the majority of representatives in both the House and Senate were “all pretty well advised . . . that the cotton manufacturers want no legislation at all along this line,” and were convinced by the manufacturers’ argument that age and hours statutes would stifle Alabama’s industrial growth and lead textile interests to invest in other southern states where such laws were not in effect. The leading cotton mill owners in Alabama, nonetheless, decided to employ a full-time lobbyist to watch after their interests at the statehouse, “a suitable person to remain in Montgomery . . . especially to defeat any legislation similar to the ten hour bill” with the Dwight Manufacturing Company agreeing to “bear its proper part of this expense.”

Mitchell, in addition to the lobbyist, remained a presence at the legislature for the Dwight Company. “I was in Montgomery Monday and Tuesday of this week,” he told J. Howard Nichols in a December 1898 report about a committee hearing on a bill proposed to prohibit the employment of children under the age of twelve years in mines and factories. “I have four or five . . . personal friends on this committee,” he assured Nichols, “including in this number the chairman.” Mitchell and the textile lobby used their influence to stop this bill and another introduced in February 1899 proposing to outlaw the working of children “of certain ages” in cotton factories before sun-up and after sun-down. R. A. Mitchell and the owners of the Dwight Manufacturing Company breathed a collective sigh of relief that their anti-regulation lobbying efforts at

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29 R. A. Mitchell, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 10 December 1898, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-2.
30 Ibid., 17 December 1898.

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the Alabama statehouse had been successful. "[T]he Legislature . . . having adjourned," Mitchell reminded the corporate officers in Boston, "... will not convene again, thank goodness, for two years."31

During the two years that the Alabama legislature was in recess, Alabama unions affiliated with the AFL, as well as the AFL’s national leadership, worked to continue the movement for mill, mine, and factory age and hours restrictions. The defeats of child labor bills in Alabama during 1898 and 1899 led members of the AFL legislative committee to urge fellow unionists to embrace their "duty to undertake an agitation for the creation of a healthier public opinion—to arouse the conscience of the people."32 Samuel Gompers, meanwhile, hired Irene Ashby, a British union activist and seasoned veteran of England’s ongoing anti-child labor campaigns, to conduct a fact-finding investigation of child labor conditions in the textile mills of Alabama and to cultivate support for regulatory legislation among reform-minded individuals and groups throughout the state. Textile mill owners disparaged Ashby as a tool of both organized labor and northern manufacturers, and as an ill-informed sentimentalist. She succeeded, nonetheless, in creating a public awareness of and support for state mandated child labor regulations by groups outside of the working-class, which the AFL realized would be necessary for any alteration of the pro-business, anti-union status quo in Alabama. Ashby’s study was the first extensive inquiry into the conditions of child labor in

31 R. A. Mitchell, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 24 February 1899, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-2; Journals of . . . Alabama, 1898-1899.
southern textile mills and was integral in jumpstarting an inter-class crusade in Alabama that sought the eradication of the employment of children throughout the state.  

Irene Ashby’s investigation took her to six cities and twenty-four out of forty-three cotton textile mills in Alabama. At these mills, she asked superintendents, managers, operatives and “persons living in close contact with mill life” dozens of questions. Her goal was to collect information on the conditions of work and the number of children under twelve years old employed at each mill, as well as manufacturers’ attitudes regarding state regulation of child labor. From the answers she received and her own personal observations, the report Ashby submitted to the AFL verified that the average workday in Alabama mills was over eleven hours per day. She also cited figures showing that of the twenty-three mills she visited, northern capital controlled ten, employing 215 children under twelve years old out of a total of 4,400 operatives. Southern capital operated thirteen of the mills visited by Ashby and 115 out of 1,968 of the operatives at these establishments were under twelve years old. Ashby estimated that the number of children ages ten to fifteen years in all the mills of the state comprised thirty percent of the entire textile workforce.

Irene Ashby’s report and her experiences researching it, confirmed for the leadership of the American Federation of Labor the intransigence of southern textile

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33 In a letter to Samuel Gompers, Prince Greene, General Secretary of the National Union of Textile Workers, argued that the AFL’s best chances for securing child labor legislation would be in Georgia or Alabama, despite previous legislative failures. See Prince Greene to Samuel Gompers, 31 December 1900, American Federation of Labor Papers, 1888-1955, National (International) Union of Textile Workers, Mss 117a, Series 11, File A, Box 47, Folder 21. On Irene Ashby and the overall goals of her study, see Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, 24-26; and Dewey Grantham, Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 181.

34 Irene Ashby, Report to the Executive Committee of the State, on the History of Child Labor Legislation in Alabama (Montgomery: n.p., 1901); American Federationist, vol. 8, no. 5; Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, 27-28; Grantham, Southern Progressivism, 181; Walter
manufacturers toward proposed regulatory legislation and toward organized labor’s attempts to secure such laws. Ashby noted that the mill owners who declared themselves strongly against child labor legislation argued that any attempt made by the state to set limits of when and for how long children could be gainfully employed in manufacturing pursuits was an infringement on parental rights. Industrialists continued this line of reasoning, pointing out that many families, especially poor widows, depended on the contributions to the familial purse of wages that their children earned in textile mills. “It is not a question of mill owners desiring to employ the children,” the industry press noted, “but one resting with their parents and involving the possible loss of the means of livelihood of whole families who are passing from penury to comfort.” Southern manufacturers used the destitute conditions in which many mill families had lived on mountain farms as a touchstone to bolster this argument, saying that although southern textile operatives did not have as high a standard of living as those working in New England mills, they were better off than before. “The whole influence of the cotton mill in the South has been beneficial to the population as a whole,” asserted industrialist Edward Sanborn, “It is distinctly a marked civilizing agency as it has given comfortable living and an elevating influence to thousands of families who never before knew anything better than a cabin in the backwoods.”


35 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 39, no. 5.

36 Edward Sanborn, “Factory Life in the South,” quoted in Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 39, no. 5. During the first decade of the twentieth century, southern textile manufacturers emphasized their images as local and regional philanthropists in order to deflect growing criticisms about the conditions of work and life in southern textile mill villages. They used the mill village as a defense against reformers by publicizing all of the “benefits” that southern textile concerns provided for their employees free of charge, and by forwarding the argument that mill owners took care of their workers and, therefore, state intervention was unnecessary. For examples see Leonora Beck, “A Model Factory Town” Forum 32(September 1901): 60-65; William Few, “The Constructive Philanthropy of a Southern Cotton Mill”
Numerous Alabama textile managers said they favored child labor restrictions but only if other southern states passed similar regulations so as to not undermine their competitive position. Samuel Gompers reminded Irene Ashby that when Massachusetts mill men had used this same argument in their fight against the Commonwealth's 1892 fifty-eight-hour law, Bay State unionists took the position that they "preferred to take the heart out of the industry than to take the hearts out of children," and won.37 Many southern textile manufacturers said that they did not necessarily want to hire children but that parents threatened to move to other mills and, they argued, without an adequate public school system, restrictions on the employment of child labor would do more harm than good. "[W]hat is to become of the children until they reach the age when they may find places in the mills?" asked Richard Edmonds of the *Manufacturers' Record.*

"[P]roper facilities are offered hardly in any of the Southern States . . . . the education which the child is receiving in the mill may be better than that which it might derive from attendance . . . [in] poorly-conducted schools," he noted, "The problem is to be settled by reason, not by hysterics."38 Arguments such as these, forwarded by southern textile interests and publicized in the regional industry press, had limited value for the manufacturers' anti-regulation campaign alone. Their persuasiveness, however, increased substantially when coupled with claims that Ashby was "acting in the interests of several northern mill owners and corporations . . . jealous of southern development"


38 *Manufacturers' Record*, vol. 39, no. 1.

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and that she was an outsider "telling the people of Alabama things about their own state
that they should have known."39

Since the late 1890s, organized labor focused on the issue of protective labor
legislation, but it was during Irene Ashby’s 1901 investigation of Alabama mills that the
base of support for child labor restrictions grew substantially. Through her inquiry, the
union came into contact with religious leaders, clubwomen, and civic leaders who
expressed interest in the movement for child labor regulation. These middle-class
reformers helped transform state action on child labor from being of interest only to
unionists into an issue that had an inter-class, humanitarian appeal. They made possible
an effective pro-regulation campaign in Alabama, even as a majority of southerners
remained hostile to the legislative agenda of organized labor.40

This new source of assistance and support for the anti-child labor movement
became known during the debates over a new child labor and compulsory education bill
introduced in 1901 into the Alabama legislature. The 1901 child labor and education bill,
which Irene Ashby helped to prepare and that state representatives A. J. Reilly in the
House and Hugh Morrow in the Senate sponsored, set the bottom-most age at which
children working in non-agricultural enterprises in Alabama could be employed at twelve
years, with exceptions made for newspaper carriers and for the children of widowed

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39 Samuel Gompers to Irene Ashby, 3 January 1901, in Kaufman, et al., The Samuel Gompers
Papers, vol. 5, 314; American Federationist, vol. 8, no. 5; Ashby, Report to the Executive Committee of the
State; Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, 28-29, 31.
40 For an overview of the rise of progressive reform in the early twentieth-century South, southern
middle-class reformers, and their roles in and agendas for regional change see Grantham, Southern
Progressivism; Edward Ayers, The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1992), 409-437; George Brown Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-
1945 (1967; reprint Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 1-32; C. Vann Woodward,
369-428; Steven Diner, A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era (New York: Hill and
mothers or disabled fathers who could work in textile mills at the age of ten. The Reilly-Morrow bill also outlawed children under sixteen years old from working between 7pm and 6am and for more than eleven hours per day or sixty hours per week. The bill, furthermore, mandated that after 1 March 1902 all employed children between twelve and sixteen years old must be able to read and have a schooling certificate filed with their employer confirming the completion of twelve consecutive weeks of school during the year. Enforcement provisions of the bill included the requirement that parents must provide sworn affidavits of a child’s age to an employer and the appointment by the Governor of a factory inspector with an annual salary of $1500. Violations of the proposed laws would result in fines from five to one hundred dollars or three months in prison for parents, and fines of not more than five hundred dollars for employers.41

The debates over the Reilly-Morrow bill pitted the state’s textile manufacturers not only against representatives of organized labor, as had been the case in the past, but also in opposition to the newly formed legislative committee of the Alabama State Federation of Women’s Clubs, members of the state’s Women’s Christian Temperance Union and other urban-based reform associations, and the Alabama Ministers’ Union led by Edgar Gardner Murphy of Montgomery. At a 5 February 1901 joint hearing by Alabama House and Senate committees, Irene Ashby and Edgar Gardner Murphy argued for the passage of the bill, facing off against R. A. Mitchell of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, the “chief railroad attorney” of the state, and a corporation clergyman. Ashby noted that R. A. Mitchell discussed, at length, the condition of the Dwight mill operatives before they came to Alabama City, the positive influence that the Dwight Company’s

41 Journals of... Alabama, 1900-1901; Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, 30; Grantham, Southern Progressivism, 181.
mill village had on the workers, “the beauties of the village, the library and the church
built by the company,” and the fact that child labor regulation would be a bane to the
lives of the families who worked in Dwight’s Alabama City mill since “the whole family
had to work in order to get a decent living.” Mitchell also reminded the legislative
committees that the repeal of the state’s 1887 hours and ages law was a determining
factor in the Dwight Company’s decision to build its branch plant in Alabama City. He
said the reversal of the law was done in “fairness to capital,” and “from which he trusted
they would not go back.” Thinly veiled threats that the Dwight Manufacturing Company
and other northern-owned mills could easily relocate to states without child labor
legislation doomed the 1901 bill and it died in committee.42

Publicpronouncementsattributedthe defeat of the Reilly-Morrow bill to the
combination of “persuasive” arguments, forwarded by industry representatives, that
regulation would be a violation of parental rights, that the legislation would unfairly
burden Alabama textile manufacturers in comparison with those in Georgia and North
and South Carolina, that it would inhibit future investments in and growth of Alabama’s
manufacturing sector, and to manufacturers’ insinuations that Murphy and Ashby were
simply tools of northeastern capital.43 In the wake of the 1901 failure of the child labor
and education bill, the southern industry press praised the Alabama legislature for
thwarting the attempts of the individuals they saw as New England emissaries and
“philanthropists for labor” to force “Southern labor to sacrifice itself in buttressing their

42American Federationist, vol. 8, no. 5; R. A. Mitchell’s testimony before the committee was also
discussed in an editorial by Irene Ashby in the New York Herald, reprinted in Labor Advocate, 30
November 1901.
43Journals of...Alabama, 1900-1901; Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile
States, 31-33; Grantham, Southern Progressivism, 182.
decaying fortunes” through regulatory legislation. Proponents of the Reilly-Morrow bill, on the other hand, came to a fuller understanding of the weight that the manufacturers’ arguments carried with state politicians and the role that the personal ties between corporation lobbyists, including Dwight’s R. A. Mitchell, and state representatives played in the loss of the measures. Edgar Gardner Murphy organized the Alabama Child Labor Committee after witnessing, first hand, the strength of the opposition to child labor reform from manufacturers throughout the state. Murphy’s experiences at the Alabama statehouse during the 1901 session convinced him that the key to putting an end to the use of child labor in Alabama’s industries, especially in textiles, depended on the cultivation of a widespread, pro-reform public opinion that would pressure legislators into action. In conjunction with the ongoing efforts of organized labor, the members of the Alabama Child Labor Committee embarked on a campaign to secure the support necessary to ensure that the state legislature would enact a child labor law when it reconvened for the 1902-1903 legislative session.

Although the New England industry press would later call the employment of child labor by Massachusetts manufacturers in their southern mills “a red herring” and chastised southerners for “declaring them, not the States themselves, guilty for laws permitting labor conditions that compare unfavorably with those of . . . Massachusetts,” the Dwight Manufacturing Company was truly embroiled in Alabama’s decades-long child labor controversy from the start. With the return to healthy business conditions

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44 Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 39, no. 22.
45 For a detailed discussion of Edgar Gardner Murphy’s role in the founding of the Alabama Child Labor Committee, see Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, especially 31; and Grantham, Southern Progressivism, especially 182.
46 Commercial Bulletin, 26 February 1910.
after the 1893 depression, the majority of New England manufacturers, while continuing to discuss the disparity of conditions between North and South as a challenge that must be addressed, did little to facilitate the equalization of regional wage, age, or hour standards that they sought. Those that did take action continued to lobby their state legislatures for the repeal of existing labor legislation or worked to secure the passage of federal regulations. During the 1893 depression, however, the Dwight Company chose capital mobility as its strategy to deal with southern competition. In the years that followed, it focused its efforts, therefore, on maintaining the “advantages” that textile manufacture in the South offered.

Dwight officials stated explicitly, numerous times, that the reason it constructed its Alabama City mill was so that the company could continue to successfully produce and market coarse goods despite the regulatory legislation secured by Massachusetts labor unions that had imposed restrictions on the operations at Dwight’s Chicopee mill and placed the company at a competitive disadvantage in comparison with southern textile manufacturers. The Dwight Company wanted to build its southern branch factory in a state dominated by manufacturer-friendly politicians and which was free from industrial regulation. For sure, Dwight officials were key participants in the repeal of Alabama’s 1887 child labor and hours law. With R. A. Mitchell acting on their behalf through the turn of the century, Dwight’s company leaders continued an ongoing campaign against the passage of regulatory legislation in Alabama so that their strategy of operating a southern branch to bolster the profitability of Dwight’s parent mill in Chicopee, Massachusetts would work. As the interest given to the issue of child labor in

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47 For examples, see Manufacturers’ Record, vol. 25, no. 8 and vol. 26, no. 8; Commercial Bulletin, 28 September 1894 and 19 January 1895; Gadsden Times-News, 3 May 1895.
Operatives outside of the Dwight Manufacturing Company's Alabama City mill, ca. 1900. Note the large group of children in the foreground on the left, and the boys by the door on the right. (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama).

During these years, likewise, state politicians and industrial boosters continued to argue that Alabama's future economic success was inextricably tied to the state's ability to draw investments of northern textile capital there. State politicians and boosters used

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48 R. A. Mitchell, Alabama City Agent to J. Howard Nichols, Treasurer, 11 May 1897, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-1.
the Dwight Manufacturing Company's decision to build its southern branch plant in Alabama City after the repeal of Alabama's single piece of industrial regulatory legislation as proof that the attraction of New England textile dollars to Alabama would come about only if the state and its citizens protected the "advantages" of cheap labor and unregulated working hours. This corporate strategy of escaping both regulatory legislation and a union presence through capital mobility, informed and drove the defense of the employment of children made by owners of Massachusetts corporations with southern branch factories. Pro-child labor reform activists, however, targeted the Dwight Company's involvement in perpetuating Alabama's laissez-faire status quo as an example of how the success of the state's textile industry, so strongly linked to the ability to attract mobile capital there, rested on a foundation that was inherently exploitative.

The purposes and implications of capital mobility vis-à-vis the Dwight Manufacturing Company's employment of children in the operation of its Alabama City mill were important elements in the 1902-1903 campaign for child labor regulation in Alabama.49 By targeting a northern company, Alabama reformers were able to articulate

49 Historians of early twentieth-century anti-child labor movements have extensively discussed the criticisms made by organized labor and child labor reformers against the employment of children in textile mills, including northern-owned ones, in the South. This early historiography of child labor reform is dominated by a good versus evil paradigm. Elizabeth Davidson in Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States and Walter Trattner in Crusade for the Children forward arguments that humanitarian interests motivated reformers to seek protective labor legislation for children employed in industries, while corporate greed and desires for high profits drove manufacturers to block the passage of effective legislation. Recent studies, however, have drawn a more complicated picture of the early-twentieth century child labor debates in the South. Whereas Davidson and Trattner glossed over the issue of how southern mill operatives themselves thought about child labor and proposals for reform legislation prior to World War I, historians such as David Carlton, the authors of Like a Family, Cathy McHugh, Wayne Flynt, and I. A. Newby, among others, have ably shown how working as a child to help one's family was normative on southern farms, and that this often simply shifted to the factory when families moved into textile villages. These scholars have also described how parents of cotton mill children regularly expressed their wishes that their sons and daughters could attend school, but poverty and a desire to be able to choose for themselves when to allow children to begin working, led many cotton mill operatives to reject reformers' attempts to eradicate child labor through regulatory legislation. See David Carlton, Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Hall, et al., Like a Family; Cathy
their pro-regulation message in sectional terms. They criticized Dwight’s employment of children as a key element of the company’s strategy of tapping into the South’s manufacturing advantages to keep its Massachusetts mills viable. In doing so, child labor reformers critiqued Alabama’s overall industrial development tactic of attracting investments from manufacturing interests that were seeking to escape stringent labor regulations elsewhere. The goal of the Alabama child labor reformers was not to stifle investments of northern firms in the state’s industries. They hoped, instead, to make a case for state mandated child labor regulations by cultivating a public opinion whereby it would be considered irresponsible and unacceptable for the owners of New England textile companies and the state’s political leadership to build Alabama’s industrial base, in the words of Irene Ashby, “on the ruin of little children.”

Edgar Gardner Murphy, as leader of the Alabama Child Labor Committee, and Ashby, speaking for the American Federation of Labor, knew that they had to be careful in their criticisms of the use of child labor in southern textile mills. In order to secure legislation that would regulate the working conditions in the state’s textile industry, a strong pro-reform public opinion would be required to effectively check the power that manufacturers exerted at the statehouse. But, many Alabamians, poor and wealthy alike, embraced owners of textile mills as public benefactors and saw the textile industry as a positive good by providing jobs and forwarding the economic development of the state. Indeed, for the overwhelming majority of textile operatives, the labor of their children was essential for familial economic stability and, therefore, they saw mill owners who

McHugh, Mill Family; Wayne Flynt, Poor But Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989); I. A. Newby, Plain Folk in the New South.

50 American Federationist, vol. 8, no. 5.
gave work to all family members in a favorable light. To cultivate widespread support for regulatory legislation it became necessary, therefore, for the reformers to avoid disparaging all southern mill owners, but instead, to attack those seen as the most flagrant abusers of the state’s industrial system. For Alabama’s child labor reformers, the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s operations in Alabama City, by virtue of being a Massachusetts-owned business that located in the South expressly to avoid the regulatory laws in New England, was a perfect target.51

Edgar Gardner Murphy openly blamed the Dwight Manufacturing Company and the lobbying efforts of Alabama City Agent, R. A. Mitchell for the 1894 repeal of Alabama’s 1887 hours and education law and the failure of the 1901 child labor bill. Hoping to begin a public discussion about the Dwight Company’s role in squelching child labor reform in Alabama, as well as to make use of reform-minded New Englanders’ ire against the unregulated working conditions found throughout the southern textile industry, in October 1901 Murphy and supporters of the Alabama Child Labor Committee brought their case against the Dwight Company to the “people and press” of New England. In an editorial penned by Edgar Gardner Murphy, Alabama child labor reformers publicly singled out and rebuked the Dwight Manufacturing Company and its corporate strategy of building and operating a mill in the South to avoid Massachusetts labor regulations. Murphy shrewdly played upon sectional sentiments as a way to generate inter-regional support for the passage of child labor legislation in Alabama. He called into question the “reputation of Massachusetts and New England as

[51] Dewey Grantham notes that reformers were careful to attack child labor, not the southern textile industrialists themselves who employed child labor, as a way to cultivate support for regulatory laws without directly challenging the perceptions of those who viewed southern mill owners as generous regional developers. See Grantham, Southern Progressivism, 185.
a center of enlightenment and of humanity in industrial legislations,” arguing that the
dearth of active support for the efforts of the Alabama Child Labor Committee implied
New Englanders' consent for the Dwight Company’s use of child labor in its Alabama
City mill. At the same time, however, he anticipated that editors of Alabama newspapers
would comment on this appeal to New Englanders and, by doing so, would force
Alabamians to engage with the question of why they should continue to allow northern-
owned textile concerns to exploit southern children. “This capital,” Murphy pointed out
to his New England and southern audiences, “is doing here what it dare not do at home.”

Dwight Manufacturing Company Treasurer J. Howard Nichols responded to the
Murphy editorial with one of his own. Nichols attempted to assuage public opinion in
both Massachusetts and Alabama regarding Dwight’s operation of a southern branch
plant and its use of child labor there. Nichols said that he and the corporate officers of
the Dwight Company were personally against the employment of children under twelve
years old in the Alabama City mill because they “were not intelligent enough to do good
work” and were ultimately unprofitable. Nevertheless, he noted, the company did hire
children because their parents forced the company to do so, as they would leave Alabama
City to find work in other mills where the entire family could find gainful employment.
The Dwight Company, according to Nichols, made the best of a bad situation created by
southern operatives themselves who forced the company to hire children, not by
Dwight’s own policy of employing children at young ages as a way to tie them to the
company and help to perpetuate the workforce. “There is nothing within the mill or out,”
Nichols argued, “of which any citizen of Massachusetts need be ashamed,” pointing out

52 Boston Evening Transcript, 23 October 1901.
the fact that the company supported the local school and built and maintained a library and church for the Alabama City mill operatives. Nichols contended that the Dwight Company did not build a branch factory in the South as a means of capitalizing on the unregulated state of the textile industry there but as a way to help raise the standards of living for the downtrodden mountain farmers who had “hitherto been deprived of needed comforts and largely of elementary advantages.” Dwight City again became a public relations tool. “From the inception of this enterprise,” Nichols asserted, “the purpose has been to build up a model town that should be an object lesson to the South, and we are assured that its influences have been helpful.” In Nichols’ portrayal of the situation, the owners and managers of the Dwight Manufacturing Company were not the profit-hungry, child-exploiting, carpet-bagging industrialists that Edgar Gardner Murphy described, but entrepreneurial philanthropists and regional benefactors who just happened to be from Massachusetts.53

J. Howard Nichols, likewise, couched the Dwight Company’s opposition to child labor legislation in Alabama as an attempt to protect the state from labor unions and restrictions destined to undermine Alabama’s competitiveness with other southern textile states. According to Nichols, the Dwight Company and other New England manufacturers operating mills in Alabama were not against child labor legislation per se, but were opposed to legislation initiated by organized labor and were against regulations in Alabama without the enactment of similar restrictions in Georgia and North and South

53 Boston Evening Transcript, 30 October 1901. The Alabama Child Labor Committee published and distributed the Murphy editorial and the ensuing debate between Murphy, Nichols, and Horace Sears in pamphlet form as Child Labor in Alabama, A Correspondence: A Discussion of New England’s Part in the Common Responsibility for the Child-Labor Conditions of the South (Montgomery: Alabama Child Labor Committee, 1902) and reprinted in Edgar Gardner Murphy, Problems of the Present South: A Discussion of Certain of the Educational, Industrial and Political Issues in the Southern States (New York: MacMillan
Carolina. Using Irene Ashby as an example and playing on the hostility many southerners felt toward labor unions, Nichols tried to discredit the child labor reform campaign as non-southern in origin and made the case that northern interests unconcerned with the welfare of southern operatives but focused on inciting “labor troubles” in the region started the movement. 54

The Dwight Manufacturing Company, Nichols emphasized, was in a unique position to know, first hand, the damage that unions and union-initiated legislation could do to companies competing with unregulated mills. But, Nichols was careful to point out, the Dwight Company was not the initiator of the campaign against the 1901 child labor bill but only a supporter of the opposition begun by native Alabamians. “As they recognized that this bill was only the entering wedge,” Nichols wrote, “they determined that action must come from within the State, and not outside. . . . [T]he manufacturers selected among others our agent, a native Alabamian, to appear before the legislative committee, with the result that the bill was defeated.” Nichols attempted to disarm Edgar Gardner Murphy’s sectional argument that New Englanders were to blame for the child labor situation in Alabama, by stigmatizing the child labor reform movement, not the manufacturers’ anti-reform campaign as caused by “outside interference.” 55

In a rejoinder, Edgar Gardner Murphy rejected the arguments made by J. Howard Nichols, especially those that attempted to shift the blame for the failure of Alabama child labor reform away from the Dwight Company and onto parents who forced mills to hire their children, and onto union agitators seeking to maliciously disrupt Alabama’s

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54 Boston Evening Transcript, 30 October 1901.
55 Ibid.

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laissez-faire status quo. Murphy again stressed the fact that it was the Dwight
Manufacturing Company which was truly the outsider, and that while the Dwight
Company had a native Alabamian as the Agent of its Alabama City mill, it was first and
foremost a Massachusetts corporation managed at its highest echelons by New
Englanders. Murphy called into question the argument made by J. Howard Nichols that
he felt child labor was economically and socially unwise, asking, “Who, then, is the
responsible representative of the actual policy of the Alabama City Mill—its Treasurer or
its representative before The Legislature? . . . [W]hy should the paid and delegated agent
of that mill labor here for weeks to thwart a simple legislative remedy for the abuses he
deplores?” Noting that Massachusetts laws outlawed the employment of children under
fourteen years old, Murphy argued that it was not too much to ask the Dwight Company
to allow Alabama to protect its children at twelve. “Is this too drastic a demand,” he
queried, “upon the exceptional philanthropy of the mill at Alabama City?” Murphy
astutely downplayed the role that organized labor played in the reform agitation, saying
that although he and the Alabama Child Labor Committee were thankful for the support
of the American Federation of Labor and Irene Ashby, they, not non-southern labor
agitators, bore primary responsibility for the movement for regulatory legislation.
“Nothing could be more baseless,” Murphy contended, “than the assumption that our
local effort for reforms is due to outside forces.”

Horace Sears, Treasurer of the Massachusetts owned West Point Manufacturing
Company located in Langdale, Alabama joined the Murphy-Nichols debate, arguing that
any child labor legislation in Alabama would be premature without a compulsory
education law being enacted first and without the passage of similar legislation in the

56 Boston Evening Transcript, 2 November 1901.
other textile states. Sears underscored Nichols’ position that child labor was a necessary evil with which Alabama textile manufacturers had to deal if they did not want to lose their labor force to mills that would hire children and parents together. Alabama industrialists, noted Sears, did not want to employ young children but did so in a spirit of philanthropy, “simply rendering willing service in our turn to those who are faithfully serving us.” He further contended that the outrage of the child labor reformers was misplaced. “I rub my eyes and wonder,” Sears proclaimed, “whether the animus of this appeal . . . is that of ignorance, or of mischievous labor agitation, or of sectional hatred, which we had hoped was long since deservedly laid away in its grave-clothes.”

As was the case with those of J. Howard Nichols, Edgar Gardner Murphy countered Horace Sears’ arguments as to why Alabama should not pass child labor regulations point by point, emphasizing the importance of seeing Nichols and Sears not as public benefactors but as representatives of northern capital making their profits from the degradation of southern children. “I would respectfully ask, who are the more likely to make accurate report of the results,” Murphy remarked, positioning himself and child labor reformers in the state as the real humanitarians, “Mr. Sears and Mr. Nichols, living in Boston and directly interested in the system they defend, or a representative of the committee . . . who are passing their lives in Alabama and who have no financial connection whatever . . . with the system they attack?” Sectional hatred, Murphy added, was not to be found within the ranks of the Alabama Child Labor Committee but would eventually be aroused in Alabama against Massachusetts capitalists like Nichols and Sears. Ending his editorial campaign in the pages of the New England press, Murphy

57 Alabama Child Labor Committee, *Child Labor in Alabama, A Correspondence* reprinted in Murphy, *Problems of the Present South*, 319-322.
returned to his initial observation that neither Alabamians nor Bay State residents should allow Massachusetts textile concerns to build branch factories or make profits from ones already operating that capitalized on the absence of regulatory legislation. "Our elementary contention is, simply," Murphy concluded, "that the common conscience will hold, and should hold, the capital of Massachusetts to the moral and economic standards of Massachusetts."\(^{58}\)

The Murphy-Nichols-Sears debate and the publication of numerous Alabama Child Labor Committee pamphlets thereafter, catapulted the issue of child labor reform into the public discourse in Alabama in a way that previous reform agitation had not.\(^{59}\) The debate and pamphlets generated widespread interest in child labor reform and made the public familiar with the arguments that reformers and manufacturers would use during the child labor agitation at the statehouse throughout the 1902-1903 legislative session. Murphy and child labor activists in Alabama continued to stress that they, not outside forces with the intention of harming the state's textile industry, were responsible for the anti-child labor reform agitation, and that they did so to safeguard the future of Alabama and to protect the white children who labored in its textile mills. "The attention of the public was turned by lectures and press notices to the fact that this was not merely a state or even a southern question," Irene Ashby, now Irene Ashby-MacFadyen, noted. "[T]he obstruction offered by these northern capitalists to the protection of children in the

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\(^{58}\) Alabama Child Labor Committee, *Child Labor in Alabama, A Correspondence* reprinted in Murphy, *Problems of the Present South*, 326-328.

\(^{59}\) Pamphlets written by Edgar Gardner Murphy and published by the Alabama Child Labor Committee in 1902 included *Pictures from the Mills; The South and Her Children; Child Labor Legislation; and A Child-Labor Law, Why Legislation Is Better Than "Voluntary Agreement" of Mills*. For an overview of the arguments forwarded in each, see Davidson, *Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States*, 38-40.
South was a national scandal. Richard Edmonds, responded by lambasting the Alabama public and press for “being played for suckers” and for supporting the movement for legislation instigated by northerners and labor agitators, and which would “cripple the textile industry in the South, [so] that a small factor of that industry in New England might profit temporarily.”

While Edgar Gardner Murphy and middle-class reformers throughout Alabama carried on their campaign to move public opinion to the side of child labor restriction, unionists continued their efforts to secure passage of effective regulatory legislation as well. Edgar Gardner Murphy, however, tried to restrain the American Federation of Labor from taking as active a role in the agitation as it had during the 1900-1901 legislative session. Realizing that the passage of any child labor law in Alabama

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60 American Federationist, vol. 9, no. 1.
61 Manufacturers Record, vol. 42, no. 6.
depended on convincing the public that it was not being done at the behest of organized labor, Murphy urged Samuel Gompers and local union leaders to take a secondary, supporting role in the 1902-1903 agitation. Under the auspices of the Alabama State Federation of Labor which was established in 1901, unionists nevertheless, continued to actively participate in the reform movement. “Organized labor will take a hand in pressing the fight,” the editor of the Labor Advocate told the paper’s readers, “The State branch will act in conjunction with the National body in pushing the fight in Alabama and also with the Central Committee of citizens of which Rev. Edgar Gardener Murphy of Montgomery, is chairman.”62

As was the case with the Massachusetts State Federation of Labor, a primary objective of the Alabama organization was to secure the passage of legislation that would be beneficial to the workers of the state, and sought to do so through lobbying and endorsing labor-friendly candidates for the state legislature. The membership of the Alabama State Federation of Labor came mostly from the ranks of the skilled trades and from the United Mine Workers. Even without a large presence of workers from textile manufacturing, the Alabama State Federation of Labor lobbied aggressively for the passage of bills that would raise the labor standards in the industry, including the one introduced into the state legislature on 24 January 1903, designed to regulate the employment of children under twelve years old in the state’s factories and manufacturing industries and to create a system of factory inspection to monitor compliance with the law.63

62 Labor Advocate, 13 December 1902.
This proposed child labor bill faced strong opposition from textile manufacturers throughout the state who sent representatives, like during the 1900-1901 session, to lobby against the legislation. The bill received a significant amount of attention in the press statewide. Favorable public opinion, cultivated during the intervening months made an outright defeat of the bill by the state’s textile lobby much more difficult than had been the case two years before. The manufacturers’ position, however, continued to hold sway with many politicians at the statehouse. The textile lobby countered Murphy’s humanitarian argument that child labor degraded the health and welfare of mill children, and the Alabama State Federation of Labor’s economic case that the use of cheap child labor forced a lowering of wages for all, with assertions of their own that the state’s textile industry would be crippled by the passage of such legislation, that the law would dissuade future investments in the state’s industry, and that the law would only open the floodgates to unions and more regulations.64

Facing the possibility of another defeat with the legislature not scheduled to reconvene until 1907, Edgar Gardner Murphy facilitated the introduction of a compromise bill. Murphy’s proposal received mixed reactions from reformers, unionists, and manufacturers alike. Child labor reformers throughout the country applauded the move, calling the compromise that could secure the passage of a child labor law “most satisfactory”65 The Alabama State Federation of Labor argued that the compromise

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64 Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, 47-50; Grantham, Southern Progressivism, 185.
65 Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 21, no. 2. Hereafter cited as Annals. Dewey Grantham argued that southern progressives, like Murphy and those associated with the Alabama Child Labor Committee, made compromises such as the one for the passage of the 1903 Alabama child labor law because they sought “accommodation and agreement” as the basis for “innovation and reform,” and due to an overriding attitude that while change was needed “extremism should be avoided in favor of change that was ‘gradual and slow,’” so as to not fundamentally undermine southern social and political traditions. See Grantham, Southern Progressivism, xvi, 34.
might “better conditions materially” and help manufacturing workers throughout the state, but asserted that it was “not the bill that should be passed.” The Alabama State Federation of Labor conceded, however, that “the struggle to gain this much has been hard enough, in fact the task has been almost Herculean” and that its passage would be better than nothing.\textsuperscript{66} The southern industry press railed against the proposed statute. No matter how restrained the regulations or how lax the enforcement might prove to be, “There is no reason . . . why opposition to the law should be relaxed one whit,” Richard Edmonds of the \textit{Manufacturers’ Record} claimed. “In the case of Alabama” he explained, “it is particularly important that no mistake be made at this time, for . . . if the mistake be made of committing Alabama to socialism, though ever so mild, the State will suffer from the mistake for four years.”\textsuperscript{67}

The compromise bill, nevertheless, became law in Alabama on 25 February 1903. The new child labor statute outlawed the employment of children under the age of twelve years in manufacturing establishments and factories, “unless a widowed mother or aged or disabled father is dependent on the labor of such child, or in case a child is an orphan and has no other means of support.” It made illegal the employment of any child younger than ten years old entirely, limited the workweek for children under twelve years old to sixty-six hours, banned anyone younger than thirteen years old from working in factories and manufacturing establishments between 7pm and 6am, and limited the work of anyone between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years during these nighttime hours to forty-eight per week. The law required that employers of minors keep affidavits signed by parents or guardians on file certifying ages and dates of birth. Parents and guardians supplying false

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Labor Advocate}, 24 January 1903.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Manufacturers’ Record}, vol. 43, no. 3.
\end{footnotesize}
age certificates were subject to fines of five to one hundred dollars or three months in jail, while employers “willfully or knowingly” violating the law would be guilty of a misdemeanor and fined up to two hundred dollars. As was the case with the first child labor law in Massachusetts in the 1830s, the Alabama statute was virtually unenforceable because of the “willfully or knowingly” clause in the penalty provisions, and due to the fact that the law did not provide for the establishment or maintenance of a department to implement and force compliance with the act’s measures. 68

After the passage of Alabama’s 1903 child labor law, unions and reformers in the state and nationwide continued to push for more strict and better enforced child labor regulations. The issue of New England textile manufacturers using child labor in their southern mills continued to be a predominant subject in the child labor discourse. “There is a wide difference in the standard of child labor legislation in the different States,” noted the Massachusetts State Federation of Labor, blaming the situation on “attorneys of the Northern capitalists who have large investments in the Southern mills—these same attorneys who in the Northern legislatures have raised the argument of Southern competition against more progressive legislation in Northern States.” 69 The most “conspicuous opponents” of improved child labor legislation in Alabama, according to child labor reformer Alexander McKelway were “The New England companies that own mills in both New England and the South” who found “their dividends twice or thrice as great from their Southern mills.” 70 Anti-child labor forces throughout the South,

69 The Liberator (formerly Labor Leader), September 1904.
however, found themselves battling not only corporations, like the Dwight Manufacturing Company who wanted to keep the unregulated industrial status quo in tact. There was also a substantial portion of the population that continued to see the owners of southern textile mills as local and regional benefactors, and those who supported the position that legislation was unwise until the industry matured to a point where regulation would not be detrimental to it. McKelway underscored the hurdles faced by southern reform advocates noting, “It is difficult for any one not reared in the South, to understand the interest and pride that this expansion of the cotton mill industry has caused among us.”

With such regional factors in mind, the American Federation of Labor, state child labor committees and reform groups, and the recently formed National Child Labor Committee, sought uniform standards of child labor regulation for every state in the nation. These reformers based their model plan on Massachusetts legislation which, by 1902, established fourteen years old as the minimum age for manufactory workers, banned night work, limited the workweek to fifty-eight hours for women and minors, set compulsory education and literacy standards, and provided for a state financed factory inspection force. Massachusetts statutes, however, were extremely advanced when compared with labor and education regulations found in the South. In 1902, no southern textile state had a child labor law. A year later, Alabama was the first Piedmont state to pass twentieth-century child labor legislation with its 1903 compromise law. By 1905, Georgia still had no child labor regulations. South Carolina had a twelve-year age limit

for textile workers, no age limits for children of widowed or dependent parents, banned work from 8pm to 6am for any child under twelve years old, but had no enforcement provisions beyond sworn statements by parents or guardians attesting to a child’s age and four months of school attendance. In North Carolina, state regulations outlawed the employment of children under twelve years old in textile manufactories and set a sixty-six hour week for all workers under the age of eighteen years. As was the case in Alabama and South Carolina, the North Carolina law did not include any mechanisms to ensure compliance with the regulations. “So far no textile state in the South has been able to secure legal provision . . . to inspect factories and enforce the law,” Neal Anderson of Montgomery lamented in 1905, “and until this is secured all legislation on the subject must be practically inoperative.”

It was toward the end of securing effective inspection, and age and education regulations closer to those found in Massachusetts, that anti-child labor advocates in Alabama turned their attention with the approach of state elections in 1906 and the scheduled start of the new legislative session in January 1907. The Dwight Manufacturing Company remained a target for child labor reformers during these years, despite the fact that the Gadsden press declared at the time of the enactment of the 1903 child labor law that “the Big Dwight mills at Alabama City were not affected . . . . no child is employed below the age of twelve and in all the discussions about the employment of children the Dwight mills were pointed out as models.” Ignoring the fact that he had aggressively lobbied among state politicians in Montgomery to prevent passage of the child labor law, the paper noted that Dwight’s Alabama City Agent R. A.

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73 Neal Anderson, “Child Labor Legislation in the South,” in *Annals*, vol. 25, no. 3, 494-495, 497-498; Davidson, *Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States*, 275; Trattner, *Crusade for the*
Mitchell "was given a large share of the credit for the condition." Dwight’s Alabama City mill, nonetheless, continued to receive substantial negative press from elsewhere.

In a series of 1906 articles that were later published in book form, Bessie Van Vorst conveyed her impressions of employment and life in textile mill towns throughout Alabama, including the Dwight Company’s operations in Alabama City. Van Vorst attempted to forward the child labor reform agendas of securing better education requirements, more effective enforcement of laws, and the cultivation of public support for Alabama’s child labor reformers even in the face of industrialists’ “philanthropy” in the mill villages. Van Vorst described how children under the legal working age of twelve years old were not only employed in the Dwight mill but had also quit going to school. “The system of ‘liberty’ in the matter of education precludes all question of regularity in school attendance . . . out of sixty-five children between the ages of seven and eleven, ten had to ‘quit’ to go into the mills,” Van Vorst wrote. “No child attends school more than three winters,” she continued, “and many of them come in for a month or two and at a time just to ‘rest up’ from work.”

She expounded upon discussions she had with children who worked in the Dwight mill to show her readers how easily textile manufacturers could circumvent the 1903 child labor law. An eleven-year-old girl who worked in the mill described to Van Vorst working twelve hour days in the spinning room with “piles” of other children who were ten and eleven years old. “They used to go in when they wuz five,” Van Vorst recorded the girl as stating, “Now they say they’re tweaulve, but they ain’t.” Questioning another

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Children, 80.

74 Gadsden Times-News, 17 April 1903.
girl, a fourteen-year-old who had been working as a spinner since age eleven, on how the company could evade the child labor regulations in place, Van Vorst learned of the practice of “hiding” small help from visitors such as herself, to the Dwight mill. “[W]e’d run out those tiniest ones,” the girl told Van Vorst, “Yes, hide ’em in the closets or anywhere . . . .”

Van Vorst went on to describe how the Dwight Manufacturing Company made the Alabama City mill village “as attractive as possible,” but chastised those who praised southern textile manufacturers and assumed that this meant that the company was “run

Three children in Dwight City, Alabama City, Alabama, ca. 1905. (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama).

almost on philanthropic principles."\textsuperscript{77} Indeed, Van Vorst stressed that the Dwight Company provided their operatives with company-owned houses, a school, library, and recreational activities, not because the owners had a vested interest in the welfare of the mill hands, but instead, because an attractive mill village was one of the best ways to acquire and maintain a stable workforce. "[T]he difficulty of procuring operatives and of keeping them is so great that it is an investment to make the surroundings as alluring as possible," Van Vorst chided, "and it is cheaper . . . than it is to raise the wages of two thousand operatives . . . where he makes 'just too much to die and not enough to live.'"\textsuperscript{78} Van Vorst contended that textile manufacturers shrewdly used mill towns like Dwight City as business tools by draping them in a mantle of social benevolence. Therefore, Van Vorst concluded, the villages should not be an acceptable excuse for refusing to enact adequate and enforceable child labor legislation. Continuing to see textile mill owners as socially-conscious, Van Vorst asserted, was proof that Alabama’s citizens were willing to "have a generation of girls and boys among the poor, the future mothers and fathers, sacrificed, crippled, deteriorated, starved slowly to death, in order that the cotton-mill industry in a single state shall prosper."\textsuperscript{79}

Remaining a faithful supporter of the Dwight Manufacturing Company and its southern operations, the Gadsden press attempted to discredit the Van Vorst expose of Alabama City, calling the information "grossly overdrawn" and "full of misrepresentation gathered in a hurried trip."\textsuperscript{79} While exaggeration played a part in reformers’ illustrations child labor abuses in southern textile mills, their portrayals of

\textsuperscript{77} Van Vorst, \textit{Cry of the Children}, 56.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Ibid.}, 56-57, 102-103.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Gadsden Daily Times-News}, 13 April 1906.
children workers, the lack of educational opportunities, illiteracy, and low standards of health and safety to be found in textile mills rested on, what historian I. A. Newby called "elements of truth."80 The facts remained that Alabama’s child labor provisions were wantonly and regularly disregarded by factory owners and managers, and that mill operatives often did not complain because economic necessity dictated that children, sometimes in violation of state laws, had to work in order for a family to financially survive. When the state legislature met again in 1907, reformers and unionists working for the passage of additional legislation raised the question of whether Alabama’s textile manufacturers should be allowed to trap the children of “lazy” mill parents in a cycle of illiteracy, poverty, and poor working and living conditions so that they could hold on to the “advantages” of cheap labor and long hours that the South had over mills in New England.81

Child labor regulation was a particularly important issue in Alabama’s 1906 gubernatorial race. The front-running candidate, Braxton Bragg Comer, had been the owner of the Avondale Mills, a cotton manufacturing company located near Birmingham. Comer portrayed himself as a reformer, calling for better funding for roads, uniform standards for the regulation of local liquor laws, railroad reforms, and further limitations

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81 Reformers often blamed the perpetuation of child labor on the parents of child operatives as well as on manufacturers. They accused mill parents of preventing their children from attending school so that the child could earn an income at the mill as a way to pad the family bank account, questioning whether it was actually poverty or greed that pushed children into the mills. In a 1928 publication, the Alabama State Child Welfare Department cited two factors as the chief causes of children leaving school for work in the state’s textile mills: “(1) Some parents claim they are actually unable to support their families without the earnings of their children. (2) Many parents are ignorant or indifferent to the advantages which education and training would give their children.” Alabama State Child Welfare Department, Child Welfare Department Records, SP 165. Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL. See also Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South*, 493-516; Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina*, 173-209; Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 62-63; Flynt, *Poor But Proud*, 191.
on child labor. His opponent, Russell Cunningham, as well as the Alabama State Federation of Labor and the Alabama Child Labor Committee, challenged Comer’s reformer image. Comer, Cunningham and the anti-child labor forces pointed out, employed children in his textile mills, contributed funds to the Alabama textile manufacturers’ lobbying efforts against proposed child labor legislation in 1900, was an outspoken opponent of the child labor bill introduced during the 1903 legislative session, and was a key player in negotiating the virtually unenforceable provisions of the compromise act passed that year. Comer was, in the words of Edgar Gardner Murphy, “the most bitter opponent of child labor legislation I have ever known,” while the Alabama State Federation of Labor urged its members to carefully scrutinize the candidates’ positions on labor-related issues before voting, noting that Alabama’s ineffective child labor regulation “is one of the problems that MUST be solved by the people at the polls.”

Braxton Bragg Comer, nevertheless, won Alabama’s 1906 governor’s race with over sixty-one percent of the total vote. When the legislature reconvened in January 1907, representatives introduced several bills that pertained to child labor, the reduction of working hours in the state’s mills, and compulsory education. The Alabama Child Labor Committee, the Alabama Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the Alabama State Federation of Labor called for the passage of anti-convict labor laws, more stringent child labor legislation, the appointment of a factory inspector, and “better protective laws for workers in mines” at its 1906 convention. See Alabama State Federation of Labor, Constitution and Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention, 1906, 20-21. Hereafter cited as Convention Proceedings.

82 Hackney, Populism to Progressivism in Alabama, 244-248, 256-287; Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, 216.
84 Hackney, Populism to Progressivism in Alabama, 284.
Federation of Labor endorsed a child labor bill, introduced into the House by Alexander Pitts of Dallas County. The Pitts bill proposed a minimum age of twelve years old for employment in mills and factories but, unless the child supported a widowed mother or dependant father, set the minimum age for employment at fourteen years. The bill also required all children ages twelve to sixteen years to attend school twelve weeks a year, set the maximum work week at fifty-four hours, outlawed night work for children under sixteen years old, and mandated that affidavits of age must be filed by parents or guardians for all mill and factory employees under eighteen years old, as well as school attendance affidavits to be supplied by county superintendents of schools. Most importantly, the Pitts bill included an enforcement clause, providing for a governor-appointed child labor inspector who would be required to make examinations of manufacturing establishments throughout the state at least four times a year. No action occurred, however, on the Pitts bill during the winter meeting of the 1907 legislature.85

As they had done during the 1903 session, between the winter and summer sessions of the 1907 Alabama state legislature, child labor reformers worked to gain support for better child labor legislation from the public and state representatives. Edgar Gardner Murphy again took the lead in the publicity campaign, writing an open letter to the state representatives in which he attacked the loose regulations of the 1903 compromise law and the arguments made by textile manufacturers that the passage of any further child labor regulations would serve to injure the prosperity of the state’s cotton manufacturing industry and Alabama’s economy overall. Attracting investments and underselling New England manufacturers in the marketplace were not, according to

85 Alabama State Federation of Labor, Convention Proceedings, 1907, 24, 43; Journals of... Alabama, 1907; Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, 218-219.
Murphy and his supporters, more important than the health and welfare of the state’s child textile operatives. "Is it an advantage to Alabama to have the lowest age-limit in the United States? Is that the kind of advertising that will help us?" he asked, in an implicit indictment of the process of drawing mobile capital to Alabama. "[A]ffixing the stigmas of low standards upon our industrial activity," Murphy continued, "is depreciating the moral credit of the prosperity which we have struggled so long and so proudly to achieve."\(^{86}\)

When the Alabama legislature met again in July, debates began over the Pitts bill in both the House and Senate. Textile manufacturers throughout the state, as anti-child labor advocates expected, lobbied in Montgomery against the passage of the bill. Reporting that the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City Agent R. A. Mitchell was "in Montgomery ostensibly for the purpose of getting a line on the child labor bill," the *Gadsden Daily Times-News* added that "all of the managers of the big cotton mills in the state" were also "on hand."\(^{87}\) Manufacturers’ resistance remained strong but after compromises and an amendment proposed by Governor Comer postponing enactment of the law until 1 January 1908, Alabama had a new child labor law that included both education and enforcement provisions.

The new regulatory statute, passed 9 August 1907, outlawed the employment of all children under the age of twelve in mills, factories, and manufacturing establishments and did away with all exemptions for children of widowed or dependent parents; required all children ages twelve to sixteen years to attend school for eight weeks, changed from

\(^{87}\) *Gadsden Daily Times-News*, 18 July 1907.
twelve in the original bill, during every year of employment; set the maximum workweek for all employees under fourteen years old at sixty hours per week, instead of fifty-four hours as initially proposed; made illegal the working of anyone under sixteen years from 7pm to 6am and limited the hours employees ages sixteen to eighteen years could work between 7pm and 6am to eight; and required all workers under eighteen years old to have an affidavit of age before beginning work. Employer violations of the law would result in fines of fifty to one hundred dollars for first time offenders and fines of one hundred to five hundred dollars for subsequent infractions, while the swearing out of false age affidavits made one guilty of perjury. Finally, the 1907 law provided for inspection of “factories and manufacturing establishments wherein women and children work” by the inspector of jails and almshouses, obliging the inspector to conduct investigations “at least four times a year if practical,” and making the inspector responsible for the initiation of prosecutions against mill owners, managers, and superintendents as deemed appropriate.88

After the passage of the 1907 child labor law, popular agitation in Alabama for more stringent regulations and enforcement waned. The Alabama State Federation of Labor decried the law as “a huge joke,” and lamented the fact that the organization “did not recognize the bill” in its final form.89 Additional child labor reform in Alabama, however, was effectively sidelined for another four years due to the fact that, except for a brief special session convened by Governor Comer in 1909 during which three minor amendments were added to the 1907 child labor law, the Alabama state legislature did

89 Labor Advocate, 9 August 1907; Alabama State Federation of Labor, Convention Proceedings, 1908, 24.
not meet again until 1911.90 In these intervening years, public attention throughout the state focused on other issues, such as the funding of better roads, railroad regulation, and prohibition. Many of Alabama's child labor reformers were only marginally satisfied with the provisions of the 1907 child labor law and were conscious of the disparity of conditions from state to state. Realizing the need for national labor standards in industry, they focused their efforts on securing federal child labor legislation.91 Unionization in the Alabama textile industry, moreover, remained negligible and because of this, according to the Alabama State Federation of Labor, there was no organization within the textile industry to force compliance with existing laws or capable of cultivating the necessary support for the enactment of better regulatory provisions.92 When the Alabama state legislature reconvened in 1911, state representatives took no additional action to strengthen the existing child labor and education regulations.93

Despite the inspection and education provisions of the 1907 Alabama child labor law, textile mill managers' continued resistance coupled with slipshod enforcement of the

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90 The amendments, applicable "only to manufacturing establishments engaged in manufacturing or working in cotton, wool, clothing, tobacco, printing and binding, glass, or other kind of work that is injurious to health when carried on in doors," required a copy of the child labor law to be posted in every such manufacturing establishment, and included changes to the age affidavits for minors whereby they also had to include the date and place of birth, and were to be filed with the employer and factory inspector. Acts of . . . Alabama, 1909 (special session).

91 Senator Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana introduced the first national child labor bill in 1906, attempting to outlaw child labor by making illegal the interstate transportation and sale of mined or manufactured goods by companies that employed children under fourteen years old. The National Child Labor Committee endorsed this bill in 1907 and numerous New England textile manufacturers supported it, but it was not until 1 September 1916 that the Keating-Owen child labor bill, based on the earlier Beveridge proposal, became law. It was declared unconstitutional on 3 June 1918. Subsequent attempts to enact and enforce federal child labor restrictions failed, as did a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution designed to give Congress the right to regulate child labor. For a detailed discussion of the movements for and against federal child labor legislation see Trattner, Crusade for the Children, especially 87-92, 95-98, 119-142, 165-185; Grantham, Southern Progressivism, 350-370; Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, 250-268.

92 Labor Advocate, 22 September 1911. On the political implications of a weak union base in the South, see Simon, "Rethinking Why There Are So Few Unions in the South," 482.

93 Journals of . . . Alabama, 1911.
act yielded only small gains to reformers and unionists seeking to remove children from the factories and place them in schools. In 1910, Alabama manufactories still employed 2,003 children ages ten to thirteen, compared to Massachusetts where manufacturing employees ages ten to thirteen years numbered 279. As late as 1912, Alabama factory inspector W. H. Oates found over 1,900 children employed illegally in the fifty-four textile mills he visited in the state during that year. Although the *Gadsden Daily Times-News* reported that deputy factory inspector, P. P. Hudson called the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City mills “the best regulated and arranged in the south,” in the 1912 annual report of the factory inspector, W. H. Oates noted that some of the most serious child labor violations found by his office occurred in Etowah County where the Dwight Manufacturing Company was located.

Mrs. W. L. Murdoch, Chairperson of the Alabama Child Labor Committee in 1913, likewise, noted that without an adequate system of birth registrations, age affidavits were nearly impossible to disprove, and that “great laxity” was shown regarding the eight weeks educational requirement for employees under the age of sixteen. “[W]here the mill owns the school,” she noted, “the report of the factory inspector shows that little attention has been paid to this requirement of the law.” C. S. Wilkinson, Agent of the

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96 National Child Labor Committee, *Child Labor and Poverty* (New York: National Child Labor Committee, 1913), 125, 128. Murdoch’s observations as well as the factory inspectors’ reports enumerating continued employment of children in violation of state child labor statutes supports the assertion made by historian Daniel Nelson that factory owners, especially those in small or company-dominated towns, often ignored labor laws and that state inspectors “had virtually no chance of obtaining convictions against the major employer.” See Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the Twentieth*
Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City mill in 1914, regarded the state’s child labor laws as little more than an annoyance. “If I understand it correctly in Mass., minors can only work 48 hours per week,” Wilkinson wrote to Dwight’s Chicopee Agent L. A. Aumann. “The laws here in Alabama regarding child labor do not conflict with the number of hours children can work—that is they work the same number the others work, which is 60 hours,” he continued, “The greatest restriction they have is that they compel the mills to dispense with the services of the children for eight weeks of the year in which

Alabama City school students and their teacher (center with bowtie), ca. 1915. (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama).

they must go to school."\textsuperscript{97}

Effective child labor regulation resurfaced as a topic of interest during the 1915 legislative session. Again, middle-class reformers and Alabama unionists worked in concert to lobby at the statehouse to secure the passage of a more comprehensive and detailed child labor statute. Although these reformers wanted legislation that would lower the working hours of minors to between forty-eight and fifty-five per week, manufacturers' resistance led to another compromise statute. The 1915 Alabama child labor law raised the legal age for children in "all gainful employments," except domestic service and agriculture, to fourteen years old; outlawed the employment of minors in manufactories under the age of sixteen for more than eleven hours a day, six days and sixty hours a week, and between the hours of 6pm and 6am; and established numerous regulations relating to the securing and filing of working papers and proof of fulfilling the eight-week educational requirement. In the same session, legislators passed a compulsory school attendance law requiring children ages eight to fifteen years to attend school at least sixty days a year, regardless of whether or not the child was to be employed in a manufacturing industry. Enforcement of the child labor and schooling provisions, however, were sketchy at best. It remained the responsibility of the state factory inspector and a small team of deputies to scrutinize all the workplaces located in Alabama and to initiate prosecutions of child labor regulation violators, as well as to enforce the requirements of the compulsory education law. This situation continued until

\textsuperscript{97} C. S. Wilkinson, Alabama City Agent to L. A. Aumann, Chicopee Agent, 10 December 1914, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MM-5.
the creation of the Alabama Child Welfare Department by act of the state legislature in 1919.98

"History is now busy repeating herself in the great Southland . . . . She will be compelled to readjust her hours of labor and open her doors to the trade union," argued Charles Pidgin, Chief of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, in 1905, "History delights in repeating herself, and the South will not prove an exception to the rule."99 Indeed, by the end of World War I, numerous fledgling textile unions existed, the employment of children in the textile industry was on the wane, and educational standards and literacy rates of minors were on the rise throughout the Piedmont South. Gradual compliance with child labor regulations, technological advances in the production of textiles, and a shift toward the manufacture of finer goods in Piedmont mills during the first two decades of the twentieth century, helped to facilitate the reduction of children working in southern mills. A wide gap, however, remained between New England and the Piedmont South in numbers of unionized workers, wages paid, and hours worked by those employed in the cotton textile industry, regardless of age.100 By retreating from efforts to organize southern unionists and turning their backs on attempts to create a viable organization below the Mason-Dixon Line after the failed Augusta strike in 1902, New England textile locals, through their inaction, aided the

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100 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 59-60. On southern educational standards and literacy rates, see Grantham, Southern Progressivism, 256-258. For a brief overview of the reduction of children in southern textile mills by 1920 and a digest of child labor regulations enacted in Alabama, North and South Carolina, and Georgia beginning with 1903, see Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States, 273-278.
efforts of southern manufacturers to maintain the region's non-union, laissez-faire status quo. This proved to be a fatal error for northern unionists in their attempts to achieve an equalization of regional hours, age, and wage standards through organization and union pressure exerted at the workplace. Because southern textile workers remained wholly unorganized, moreover, they could not force manufacturer compliance with the limited regulatory legislation passed in their states during the first two decades of the century.

The disparity of regional conditions would be aggravated further during the 1920s when a long-term depression, lasting nearly twenty years, began in the textile industry. The industry-wide economic downturn, and the labor unrest that it sparked, made many New England manufacturers reconsider the strategy, embraced decades earlier by corporations like the Dwight Manufacturing Company, of tapping into the lower production costs found in the southern textile states by building branch factories there. The Dwight Company, however, having already taken this first step in the process of capital mobility, took the next one by closing its Chicopee mill entirely.
CHAPTER V

"WE HAVE SEEN THE ARMISTICE SIGNED AND WITNESSED A GENERAL DEMORALIZATION OF BUSINESS:" THE DWIGHT MANUFACTURING COMPANY, LABOR, AND CAPITAL MOBILITY DURING THE TEXTILE DEPRESSION OF THE 1920s

In January 1916, the managers and overseers of the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City textile mill gathered with prominent townspeople for a six-course banquet to celebrate the company’s recent record output of manufactured cotton goods. “The record made by the mill has been most remarkable during the past six months . . . . The parent mills at Chicopee, Mass., are running on full time and the Alabama City mills are fully as prosperous,” boasted Alabama City’s mayor, W. T. McCord. “[I]t is said,” noted the local press, “to have been one of the most enjoyable affairs . . . ever held here.”¹ During the years of World War I, the textile industry saw production and profits soar as wartime orders kept mills running virtually non-stop. Cotton mill operatives, likewise, saw their earnings rise, joined labor unions in record numbers, and looked forward to better times ahead. With the armistice in 1918, however, government contracts ended, the demand for cotton goods plummeted, and warehouses overflowed with unsellable stock. Throughout the 1920s, textile mill owners waited, year after year, for increased consumer consumption, better profits, and an industry-wide recovery. Prosperity’s decade proved instead to be one of depression for the textile industry. Mill operatives, North and South, saw the gains of the war years slip away with

¹ Textile Manufacturer, 14 January 1916; Gadsden Daily Times-News, 10 January 1916.

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rounds of wage cuts, unsuccessful strikes, and open-shop campaigns used by management to eradicate unions from their mills. As the textile depression deepened, the mistakes of New England textile unionists in their past approaches to “southern competition” caught up with them. Decades of focusing on local interests had undermined a wider solidarity and fundamentally spoiled any possibility of a strong national union that could impose common standards of wages, hours, and working conditions throughout the industry. Indeed, many of these New England unionists saw southern textile workers more as threats to their wages and working conditions, than as friends with whom they had a common cause and should form a united front. Through the 1920s, New England operatives often blamed southern workers themselves, not the conditions under which they labored, for the successive rounds of wage cuts and mill closures that plagued the industry in the North. As increasing numbers of textile companies throughout New England looked southward, hoping to save themselves from bankruptcy, the UTWA found itself without a membership base or strategy capable of halting the movement of textile capital to the states of the Piedmont South. Nowhere were the implications of the UTWA’s virtual powerlessness more evident than at the Dwight Manufacturing Company. Dwight management used the open shop branch mill it had operated in Alabama City since 1896 to extract concessions from the unions organized at the parent mill in Chicopee and ultimately, to make the Chicopee mill and its workers expendable as the company struggled to remain profitable in the midst of depression conditions.

Hints of the impending 1920s textile depression were evident in New England nearly a decade before, when cotton textile manufacturers experienced a series of slack
years during the 1910s. “Conditions in cotton manufacturing during the past six months have been deplorable,” lamented Franklin Hobbs, President of the National Association of Cotton Manufacturers in 1911, “Mills have been running short time and it is estimated that during the past month production, both north and south, has not been fifty per cent of normal.”2 As was the case with most coarse goods producers, the Dwight Manufacturing Company felt the pinch of these slow years. During the summer of 1914, the Dwight mill in Chicopee began operating on a four-day schedule, due, according to the local press, to the “present business depression.”3 Unlike many Massachusetts mills that were unable to make enough earnings to pay dividends to their stockholders, however, the Dwight Company, because of its Alabama City operations, remained profitable. For the eighteen months from December 1913 to May 1915, for example, the Dwight Company made a net profit of over sixty-two thousand dollars, even though the Chicopee mill registered a net loss of over seven thousand dollars.4 The lower wages paid to and longer hours worked by the operatives at the Alabama City mill translated into a lower production cost for Dwight’s southern-made goods and profits for the parent company in Massachusetts even during a downturn in the industry.

By 1916, despite shortages of labor, scarcities of supplies such as textile dyes and processing chemicals, and higher cotton prices due to increased demand and crop destruction by the boll weevil, World War I had breathed new life into the struggling cotton textile industry. To meet the growing need for wartime cotton goods, textile

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3 Springfield (MA) Republican, 25 July 1914.
4 The Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City mill made a net profit of $69,631.15 and the Chicopee mill registered a net loss of $7,503.67 for the eighteen months ending May 1915. The company’s total net profit was $62,127.48. Journals, June 1911-May 1919, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, DB-11. Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard University, Boston, MA.
companies throughout the country expanded their productive capacities by building new mill facilities, installing the most modern spinning and weaving machinery, and adding shifts. Within nine months of announcing that it would decrease its production to a four-day schedule, the Dwight Manufacturing Company in Chicopee was operating on a full-time basis with the addition of a night shift, and gave notice that its 2,000 employees would receive “the benefits of better business conditions and correspondingly large incomes” with departmental wage increases. The company also began a major overhaul of its mill complex that took until 1922 to complete. Dwight’s Alabama City operatives saw their share of wartime profits as well in the form of wage increases and in village and mill improvements. The company financed the construction of a company hospital, a new school and post office, dozens of new homes, and a “modern” sanitation system for the residential district, and installed a dust removal system and new machinery, including nearly three hundred automatic looms, in the mill. Both the Chicopee and Alabama City mills were working on filling government orders for tent cloth by the spring of 1917, and throughout the course of the war, the company shipped more than 1.2 million yards of “grey shelter” cloth for use by U.S. armed forces. Even with wage increases for operatives in Alabama City and Chicopee and the substantial changes made to the Chicopee complex and to the Alabama City mill and village, between December 1916

5 Springfield (MA) Republican, 14 April 1916. The Dwight Manufacturing Company razed three of its seven mill buildings in Chicopee, rebuilding and retooling two of them. Dwight’s corporate officers financed the project through the House of Morgan.


and May 1920, the Dwight Manufacturing Company recorded the highest profits in its history.8

World War I not only created the conditions in which textile companies could make record financial gains, but it also stimulated union organization throughout the industry. After an absence of a decade, in 1912 the leadership of the United Textile Workers of America again turned their attention to the possibility of organizing textile workers in the Piedmont South. But, facing chronic shortages of funds, virulent anti-unionism throughout the industry, the apathy of New England locals toward organization below the Mason-Dixon Line, and an inability to bridge regional, ethnic, gender, and skill lines meant that the UTWA’s commitment to organize, especially among southern mill hands, remained limited at best. In 1913, the UTWA employed seven full-time and three part-time organizers to undertake the work of unionizing the workforce of the entire U.S. textile industry. Between 1915 and 1919, the number of UTWA organizers in the field never reached more than thirteen.9

Despite these limitations, however, during World War I the United Textile Workers of America did see a significant increase in its membership as part of the overall growth of unionized workers in U.S. industries. Workers’ demands for better wages and

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8 Profits for the Dwight Company’s mills between December 1916 and May 1920 at six month intervals were $43,954.86 in Chicopee and $124,046.84 in Alabama City (May 1916); $98,265.46 in Chicopee and $85,659.88 in Alabama City (November 1916); $185,315.51 in Chicopee and $119,083.65 in Alabama City (May 1917); $119,502.19 in Chicopee and $224,125.35 in Alabama City (November 1917), $265,695.48 in Chicopee and $26,227.45 in Alabama City (May 1918); $87,099.68 in Chicopee and $126,197.09 in Alabama City (November 1918); $70,661.36 in Chicopee and $239,298.88 in Alabama City (May 1919); $151,189.48 in Chicopee and $513,498.65 in Alabama City (November 1919); $124,632.01 in Chicopee and $698,981.38 in Alabama City (May 1920). Journals, June 1911-May 1919 and June 1919-August 1927, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, DB-11 and DB-12.

working conditions, coupled with labor shortages and government policies designed to ensure steady production and labor-capital peace during wartime, translated into growing membership rolls, union recognition by some employers, and the eight-hour day for workers in several major industries. Although the most significant gains were made among unions, such as those in coal and the railroads that were under federal control during wartime, mass industries like steel, meatpacking, and textiles realized membership increases as well. Union affiliations in industries nationwide increased by more than seventy percent from 1917-1920, and by 1920 the UTWA claimed jurisdiction over 100,000 textile workers.10 The UTWA did not have the resources to sustain an all-out, nationwide unionization campaign, but it embraced a strategy whereby established unions, primarily those in New England, pushed for employer concessions through strike threats while organizers were sent to individual unorganized mills where a walkout loomed or had occurred to take charge the conflict, enroll members, and establish new locals. UTWA members in New England, likewise, continued to fight for industrial labor legislation, and under the auspices of the Massachusetts State Federation of Labor, unionists from the UTWA played a significant role in securing the passage of a forty-eight-hour law in Massachusetts.11 Between 1917 and 1919 an estimated 40,000 southern

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10 The 100,000 members claimed by the UTWA represented only ten percent of the entire textile industry workforce. This was a substantial increase, however, as a marginal one to three percent of the U.S. textile workforce were members of the UTWA from the union’s establishment in 1901 through 1917. Cletus Daniel, Culture of Misfortune: An Interpretive History of Textile Unionism in the United States (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 21; David Montgomery, The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925 (1987; reprint New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 330-369; Melvyn Dubofsky, The State and Labor in Modern America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 63-75.

11 The Commonwealth passed a fifty-eight-hour law in 1892 and a fifty-four-hour law in 1911. The 1919 Massachusetts statute limited the workweek of women and minors employed in manufacturing establishments to forty-eight hours per week and outlawed the employment of women and minors between the hours of 6pm and 6am. Because of the preponderance of women employed in the textile industry and
textile mill workers joined the UTWA, comprising the majority of the nearly 70,000 men and women who became UTWA members between 1914 and 1920.12

By the end of World War I, the Gadsden, Alabama area had a strong union presence. Labor unions existed among the city’s carmen, machinists, sheetmetal workers, iron workers, blacksmiths, carpenters, moulders, electricians, plumbers, bricklayers, telegraph operators, barbers, motion picture operators, and printers, painters and paper hangers.13 The wartime unionization drives of the United Textile Workers of America, however, did not reach the Dwight mill in adjacent Alabama City. The longstanding anti-union climate perpetuated by the Dwight Company’s management, steady production schedules, rising wages, mill village and workplace improvements, and the dearth of UTWA organizers in mill towns free of labor conflict, meant that the union

the fact that no mill could function without them, the 1919 act, as was the case with the previous hours laws passed in Massachusetts, effectively extended to all textile operatives and made the forty-eight-hour week standard throughout the state’s textile industry. Massachusetts State Federation of Labor, History of the Massachusetts State Federation of Labor (Boston: The Federation, 1935), 82-97.

12 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 186-187; Janet Irons, Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 19-20; George Sinclair Mitchell, Textile Unionism and the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 32-42. Unlike the AFL, the Industrial Workers of the World did not cooperate with the government or support the war effort. Focusing on the unskilled immigrant operatives that the UTWA largely ignored, the IWW, despite attempts by employers and the government alike to destroy the union, engaged in organization campaigns through the war years in several textile centers of the Northeast. The 2 January 1919 edition of the Springfield (MA) Republican reported that the IWW had organized an estimated 250 workers in Springfield during the winter of 1918. The presence of the IWW in the Springfield-Holyoke-Chicopee area led local businesses to propose “a campaign to fight the I.W.W’ism and Bolshevism, which they fear is getting a strong foothold in the neighborhood” through “semi-weekly advertisements to thwart [it]” in the pages of the Springfield (MA) Republican and the Springfield Daily News. When asked to participate in the advertising campaign in February 1919, the Dwight Manufacturing Company declined, arguing that a public campaign against the IWW in the local papers would only serve to give the union more press. L. A. Aumann, Chicopee Agent to Ernest Lovering, Treasurer, 26 February 1919, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MK-5. For an overview of the IWW and the organization’s activities during World War I see Melvyn Dubofsky, We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), especially chapters 14-17, and The State and Labor in Modern America, 63-69; Stewart Bird, et al., Solidarity Forever: An Oral History of the IWW (Chicago: Lake View Press, 1985); David Goldberg, A Tale of Three Cities: Labor Organization and Protest in Paterson, Passaic, and Lawrence, 1916-1921 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Steve Babson, The Unfinished Struggle: Turning Points in American Labor, 1877-Present (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 32-34; Daniel, Culture of Misfortune, 21-24.

did not gain a foothold among Dwight’s Alabama City operatives. In the Dwight Company’s Chicopee mill, likewise, labor-management strife was almost non-existent. Disagreements occurred over increasing workloads and the entrance of Greek workers into the overwhelmingly French-Canadian ranks of the loomfixers but, despite the presence of unionized loomfixers, nappers, carders, weavers, and spinners in the mill, these disputes were resolved at the departmental level and no strikes or lockouts took place.\footnote{John Golden, UTWA President to L. A. Aumann, Chicopee Agent, 10 March 1915; and Aumann to Golden, 16 September 1915, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MP-5, Folder 9. It was the policy of the UTWA and the AFL in general to avoid strikes as much as possible during the war. Samuel Gompers insisted on this “no strike” policy as the means through which labor could extract concessions from the government and employers with assurances that production would not be hampered by AFL-led work stoppages. Many organized workers, however, engaged in unauthorized, wildcat strikes during the war to gain better working conditions, higher wages, shorter working hours, and union recognition. See Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 59-77; Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, 330-410; McCartin, *Labor’s Great War*, especially 38-172; James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900-1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 214-254.}

The flush times of the war years that mitigated the potential for labor trouble at the Dwight Manufacturing Company, nevertheless, gave way to a return of sluggish conditions throughout the industry by the autumn of 1920. According to Paul Seabury, during World War I the textile industry was on “a kind of week-end economic debauchery, with its inevitable gloomy Monday when normal peacetime conditions returned.”\footnote{Paul Seabury, *The Waning of Southern “Internationalism”*, quoted in Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 56.} Wartime orders put an end to speculations that arose among manufacturers by 1914 that the cotton textile industry had entered a period of prolonged depression. But, with the cessation of government contracts, many textile companies watched the price of and demand for cotton goods collapse, and saw their accounting books revealing shrinking profit margins. “We have seen the armistice signed and witnessed a general

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demoralization of business,” noted National Association of Cotton Manufacturers President W. Frank Shove, “War contracts were canceled in wholesale fashion and the general result . . . was that the market for textiles dropped from the high points of 1918 to—in some cases—half the value.”\textsuperscript{16}

The underlying factors of the textile depression of the 1920s were myriad. Tariff restrictions and the growth of textile production in countries like India, Egypt, China, and Japan as they began developing their own industries, meant a decreased demand for American-made goods in numerous foreign markets and severely limited the ability of American manufacturers to dump surplus goods overseas. Domestically, the new fashion of rising hemlines meant falling demand for fabric, and the introduction of synthetic fabrics such as rayon and nylon, cut into cotton textile sales nationwide. The rapid expansion of the industry that had taken place during World War I and technological improvements, furthermore, spurred overproduction. No widespread consolidations occurred in textiles as they had in other major manufacturing industries and this meant that hundreds of small firms competed for dominance in a contracting marketplace. Throughout the decade, overproduction and glutted markets became more severe as individual mills attempted to capture a larger share of the shrinking market by producing more goods at a lower price than their competitors. Overproduction begat overproduction and mill managers throughout New England and the South constantly looked for ways to cut their manufacturing costs. What followed was a decade of

\textsuperscript{16} NACM Transactions, Annual Meeting, 1919, 195-196.
sporadic production, increased workloads for operatives, and rollbacks of the wage
increases and bonuses paid to millhands during the labor-scarce war years.\textsuperscript{17}

Good times continued at the Dwight Manufacturing Company through the spring
and summer of 1920. In May, the Dwight directors announced that stockholders would
receive a one hundred percent dividend and that the company’s capital stock would be
increased so that it could, in addition to the ongoing overhaul at the Chicopee facility,
add “several departments” to the Alabama City mill.\textsuperscript{18} The high profits earned by the
Dwight Company during the war years, however, quickly turned into losses. “[T]he
situation today is the worst since the decline began,” David Clark of the \textit{Southern Textile
Bulletin} observed during the summer of 1920, “and it seems that severe curtailment of
output is the only remedy.”\textsuperscript{19} The first sign of the textile depression came to Alabama
City in mid-September when Dwight supervisors informed the operatives that the mill
would be closed for one week. “The reasons given for the closing,” the local newspaper
informed its readers, “are that . . . the stock of goods . . . are piling up in the warehouses .
. . and a little relief is necessary at this time to relieve the situation.” When the Alabama
City mill reopened, it operated on a reduced schedule of three days a week.\textsuperscript{20} Within six

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\textsuperscript{17} Irving Bernstein, \textit{The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933} (1960: reprint
Our Responsibility?: Unions and Economic Change in the New England Textile Industry, 1870-1960}
(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 51-53; Kane, \textit{Textiles in Transition}, 37; Bryant
Simon, \textit{A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Mill Hands, 1910-1948} (Chapel Hill: University
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Southern Textile Bulletin}, 12 August 1920.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Gadsden Daily Times-News}, 13 September 1920. The local press did not make mention of the
mill reopening on a three-day schedule. An article printed in the \textit{Gadsden Daily Times-News} on 22
December 1920, however, noted that the mill had been “running three days a week for the past eight
weeks.”
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months, the Dwight Manufacturing Company had gone from making a net profit of over $800,000 to recording a net loss of over $1.5 million.21

The textile operatives at Alabama City received the welcome news that the company planned to increase production and begin operating four days a week for nine hours a day, effective 10 January 1921. Dwight management, however, also notified its Alabama City employees that a new wage schedule would be in effect whereby all operatives would face a reduction of twenty-five percent and the total elimination of the ten percent bonuses paid to full-time employees during the war years. Dwight’s Chicopee employees, following a month-long mill closure, saw their wages lowered by twenty-two and one-half percent on 19 January 1921.22 “The popular cry of the manufacturer is ‘wages must come down like everything else,’ and this sounds logical at the very first glance,” noted UTWA President John Golden about the wave of post-war wage cuts, “they fail to remember, however, that the cost of the bare necessities of life have come down so little that the workingman up to the present time has barely felt it.”23 Indeed, operatives bore the brunt of the textile depression as mill managers throughout the industry shifted the expense of mill losses to their employees by making wage reductions the cornerstone of their cost-cutting strategies.

During the winter and spring of 1921, the Dwight Manufacturing Company did not reduce wages any further but the Chicopee and Alabama City mills operated on

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21 The Dwight Manufacturing Company’s net profits for the six months ending May 1920, were $698,981.38 for the Alabama City mill and $124,632.01 for the Chicopee mill, for a total net profit of $823,613.39. For the six months ending November 1920, however, the company’s net losses were $413,206.10 for the Alabama City mill and $1,095,543.57 for the mill in Chicopee. The total loss over the six-month period was $1,508,749.67. Journals, June 1919-August 1927, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, DB-12.


23 Textile Worker, January 1921.
sporadic schedules. “We have impressed everyone with the importance of getting the
greatest production possible in order to keep costs down,” Chicopee Agent L. A. Aumann
reported to Dwight Treasurer Ernest Lovering on the operations there, “We are reducing
help to the lowest possible limit, and also shutting down departments whenever we see an
opportunity to save a dollar.” The Alabama City mill, meanwhile, closed every
alternate week until the mill began operating on a steady schedule of five-days and fifty-
hours every week in June. “This is the first encouraging break in the present industrial
depression since the steel plant resumed operations the first day of May,” the Gadsden
press noted, “Throughout the district there is a distinct undertone of encouragement.”
Upon the announcement that the Alabama City mill would begin operating on a six-day,
sixty-hour per week schedule in late July, the local press happily noted that the company
had received several large orders, praising the Dwight Company’s management for
keeping “the mills running as much as possible to take care of the employes [sic]” during
the recent downturn in business. Operatives at the company, however, felt differently.

The sting of short-time operations, wage reductions, and chronic mill closures
sowed the seeds of discontent among the employees at the Dwight Manufacturing
Company’s Alabama City mill. “[U]p to a few years ago the standard of wages
prevailing in the textile industry was notoriously low and once these workers have
enjoyed a fairly decent wage,” John Golden declared, “they don’t propose to go back to

24 L. A. Aumann, Chicopee Agent to Ernest Lovering, Treasurer, 31 January 1921, Dwight
Manufacturing Company Collection, MK-5.
25 The effect of closing the mill every alternate week until the fifty-hour week began in June was
that Dwight’s Alabama City operatives averaged only twenty-two and one-half hours of work per week.
Gadsden Daily Times-News, 11 June 1921. The Southern Textile Bulletin also announced Dwight’s move
to a fifty-hour week noting that “the big plant has had a struggle keeping in operation” due to the amount of
the former low standards.”

Like textile operatives throughout the Piedmont South between 1919 and 1921, the Dwight Alabama City millhands looked to union organization and collective action against their employer as a means through which they could prevent management from undermining the wage increases and relative economic stability realized during the war years. The Dwight workers initially organized, not under the auspices of the United Textile Workers of America or any other established textile union, but with the help of the Gadsden local of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen. Over one thousand Dwight operatives officially organized the Alabama City textile union at a meeting on 9 October 1921. By the next meeting held later that week, the union had applied to become a local within the UTWA and over 1,450 of Dwight’s 1,500 workers had joined. “There was a large delegation from the car workers present,” the Gadsden Times-News informed its readers about the gathering, “and they are standing squarely behind the new textile union . . . . For some time the organizers have been at

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27 Textile Worker, January 1921.
28 Historians of the textile South have noted that wartime wage increases gave textile operatives the ability to more fully participate in the burgeoning consumer culture of the early 1920s and generated rising standard of living expectations among millhands, especially those in their teens and early 20s who grew up in mill villages, had little or no direct connection to the land as their parents had, and who saw themselves as permanent wage-earners. In order to protect the gains made during World War I, southern operatives were more willing to challenge management through collective action when mill owners, during the economic downturn experienced in the textile industry by 1920, began to rollback the wage increases and workplace concessions made during wartime. See Hall, et al., Like a Family, 195-196; Simon, A Fabric of Defeat, 43-44; Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 58-59; Irons, Testing the New Deal, 26-27. Between 1919 and 1921, major strikes took place in Charlotte, Kannapolis, Concord, Huntersville, and Rock Hill, North Carolina, Knoxville, Tennessee, and Columbus and the Horse Creek Valley of South Carolina. On the 1919-1921 strike wave, see Hall, et al., Like a Family, 187-195; Textile Worker, August 1921.
29 Gadsden Daily Times-News, 13 October 1921. In Labor’s Great War, Joseph McCartin discussed the importance of unionized skilled workers acting as “spark plugs” during World War I, initiating the organization of unskilled workers who did not yet belong to unions. A similar “spark plug” effect seems to have been present as the Gadsden carmen aided the Dwight Alabama City textile workers in their attempt to form a union during the summer and fall of 1921. See McCartin, Labor’s Great War, 105.
work on this organization and last night their dreams came true, even better than it was anticipated.”

The Alabama City textile union struck the Dwight mill on Monday, 31 October 1921. “Only 18 employees remained in the mill,” the local press reported, “and they also came out a few minutes later” in response to the firing of Dwight employee W. J. Mann “because he was talking unionism.” It was the first collective protest initiated by the Alabama City operatives since the opening of the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s southern branch in 1896. Spokespersons for the Dwight union stated that “their members were standing solid,” and vowed to remain on strike until they received “recognition of the union and an increase in wages.” C. S. Wilkinson, Agent of the Alabama City mill, simply stated in return that the company was “marking time” and felt no compunction to bargain with the union as there was “a large reserve stock of finished goods stored in the warehouses” and “a very small demand for cotton goods on the market.” By Friday, the strike appeared to be over, settled “in a satisfactory manner to all parties concerned,” with Agent Wilkinson agreeing to the union’s demands if the workers would end the work stoppage and return to the mill on Monday.

As had been its practice since the 1870s during moments of labor strife at its Chicopee mill, however, the Dwight Manufacturing Company had no intention of

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30 *Gadsden Daily Times-News*, 10 and 13 October 1921. Gadsden delegates to the 1920 convention of the Alabama State Federation of Labor requested “all the possible aid to organize the different industries of Gadsden, Ala., and the surrounding territory,” noting that the only well established union in the area was local #1047 of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen. It is likely that the organization of Dwight textile workers, with the help of the Gadsden carmen, was part of a unionization drive initiated by the Alabama State Federation of Labor. See Alabama State Federation of Labor, *Constitution and Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the Alabama State Federation of Labor*, May 1920, 120. Hereafter cited as *Convention Proceedings*.

31 *Gadsden Daily Times-News*, 2 and 8 November 1921.

negotiating with the Alabama City union. When the Alabama City operatives arrived for
work on 7 November, they found the gates locked and the mill silent. Although three
days earlier Agent Wilkinson “gave his word of honor that there would be no
discrimination between union and non-union employes [sic],” he notified the union that
the mill would reopen only on the condition that members “lay down their [union] cards.”
Even with the arrival of Henry Etaugh, Second Vice-President of the UTWA, Wilkinson
would not negotiate with the local and had the aim, according to the local press, “to fight
the union organization here and try to starve them out.”
33 By Wednesday, with public
sentiment in the Gadsden area strongly supporting the locked-out operatives and UTWA
strike-funds being distributed to the Dwight workers, Wilkinson, fearing a significant
community-wide backlash against the company, announced that Dwight management
wanted to avoid a protracted conflict and would resume operations on a fifty-five-hour
per week schedule. Union members, according to Wilkinson, were not required to
renounce their UTWA memberships as a condition for re-employment. “[T]he Dwight
Company will manage the working of the mill just the same in the future as it has been
managed in the past,” the company’s official statement declared, “All we ask is that
employees that go back to work will do their whole duty and be loyal to the company . . .
. and the mill will treat every one square that will do the right thing.” The issues of union
recognition and wage increases, Wilkinson added, would be “arranged between the
workers and the management as soon as these problems can be taken up.”
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Upon resumption of mill operations, however, Alabama City employees quickly
learned the expectation of being “loyal to the company” meant that management would

33 *Gadsden Daily Times-News*, 7 November 1921.
not tolerate a union presence among its operatives, and Dwight’s union-busting continued. The company engaged the services of labor agents to hire new employees “and as fast as secured, the old employees [were] laid off and the new help put in.” Wilkinson fired all operatives who would not give up their union membership, informed them that they would never be rehired at the Dwight mill, and ordered all discharged workers and their families to vacate company houses within ten days. Those who refused to leave their homes were threatened with prosecution for unlawful detainer and removal by force, and the company fined workers “for calling a new employee the usual name applied to a non-union worker who is employed as a strikebreaker.” The local press characterized the situation in Alabama City as “open war on the Textile Workers,” adding that even employees who “have been with the company for ten and fifteen years and whose work has been satisfactory . . . have been discharged with some frivolous trumped up excuse to get them out of the way.”

The firings and evictions continued through December 1921 and into January 1922, but members of the Dwight textile local in Alabama City were “still standing together.” In February, the Dwight Manufacturing Company found itself beset by labor troubles in both its Massachusetts and Alabama City mills, with unionized workers in Chicopee threatening to strike. In textile mills throughout New England, precipitated by the imposition of a round of twenty percent wage cuts, a series of region-wide strikes occurred involving roughly 85,000 textile operatives in mills from Maine to Rhode Island and lasting nearly the entire year. Although New England mill owners justified the wage

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35 _Gadsden Daily Times-News_, 24 November, and 1 and 2 December 1921. Two examples of the eviction notices given to fired workers appeared in the 24 November edition.

36 _Ibid._, 4 January 1922.
reductions saying that, “Wages and costs of production in the South ... were so much lower than in the North that northern mills were facing destruction,” UTWA President John Golden countered that southern competition was simply “a device for justifying low wages in New England, in order to continue big profits.” The primary issue for the Dwight Manufacturing Company, however, was not simply how to lower costs and wages to match southern conditions, but how to cut the wages paid to its employees in Massachusetts and prevent its Chicopee employees from striking as it continued its campaign to eradicate the Alabama City union.

The Dwight Company, in January 1922, announced its intention to cut wages at the Chicopee mill by twenty percent. The Dwight loomfixers’ union was the first to vocalize its displeasure with the plan. Hoping to avert a strike, Chicopee Agent L. A. Aumann informed the union that he would be willing to decrease the reduction to ten percent in exchange for an agreement that they would stay at work. Upon receipt of the news, the loomfixers told Aumann that they “absolutely refuse any cut down at this time,” and would strike if an agreement with management about the wage issue could not be reached. Behind the scenes, meanwhile, Aumann “got busy at once with the Overseers, and told them to take up the 10 percent reduction with their operatives to find out their attitude,” informing the Dwight corporate officers that he thought “that the matter was taken up at exactly the right time.” The mill supervisors found that a majority of the employees, after having “impressed on them the fact [that the] mill had been

37 *Textile Worker*, April and May 1922.
39 L. A. Aumann, Chicopee Agent to Ernest Lovering, Treasurer, 2 February 1922, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MP-5, Folder 1.
running solely for their benefit, when it should have been closed,” would accept the ten percent cut and would not support any walkout by the loomfixers. Facing a no-win situation within the mill and the possibility that loomfixers who were out of work because of strikes going on elsewhere in the region would fill the positions should they walk out, the Dwight loomfixers capitulated.\textsuperscript{40}

With the strike threat in Chicopee safely put to rest, Dwight management returned its full attention to breaking the union in Alabama City. Within a week of settling with the Chicopee loomfixers, Alabama City Agent C. S. Wilkinson announced that the mill would effect a partial shutdown and operate only three days a week, leaving the local press to wonder “just why the mill officials are taking this course as nearly all of the mills in the east are out on strike.” The Alabama City union immediately began deliberations on how to “counteract” the move by the company and UTWA official Henry Etaugh returned to Alabama City with “full authority to order a strike.”\textsuperscript{41} What the townspeople of the Gadsden area and Dwight’s southern operatives themselves failed to realize, however, was that Dwight management was capitalizing on the absence of communication and cooperation between the unionized workers in its Massachusetts and Alabama mills. The company made the concession of only cutting wages in the Chicopee mill by ten percent instead of by twenty percent to avoid a strike. By doing this, it ensured that production could continue in Chicopee even as the company took steps to precipitate a crisis in Alabama City to finally rid themselves of the southern

\textsuperscript{40} L. A. Aumann, Chicopee Agent to Ernest Lovering, Treasurer, 16 February 1922, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MP-5, Folder 1.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Gadsden Daily Times-News}, 25 February 1922.
union and the potential for higher wages and limits on Dwight’s managerial prerogatives that came with it.\textsuperscript{42}

Upon his arrival in Alabama City, Henry Etaugh of the UTWA cautioned the Dwight union against an immediate walkout and, citing the troubled condition of the industry, urged them to attempt to “iron out” their differences with the company. But, after enduring relentless harassment by management and nearly six weeks of operating on the three-day per week schedule, members of the Dwight local had had enough and struck the Alabama City mill without UTWA approval. Agent Wilkinson declared himself “in the dark” as to the reasons for the walkout. Representatives of the Dwight local, however, stated, “that a large part of the machinery had been speeded up so as to make additional goods, which would amount to approximately 25 per cent cut in wages,” and when coupled with the shortened workweek, it created conditions that “the owners knew they would not stand for.”\textsuperscript{43}

C. S. Wilkinson, like during the 1921 strike and lockout, refused to bargain with the union, “giving as his reason that he would be giving tacit recognition” by doing so. The striking workers quickly found themselves in a much more precarious situation than when they struck the mill in 1921.\textsuperscript{44} During the 1922 strike, only about half of the Alabama City operatives left the mill in support of the union protest. In the months between the two walkouts, many union members had been discharged, while others

\textsuperscript{42} The practice of operating branch factories independently of each other and exploiting the ability to continue production in one plant while another was on strike to mitigate the impact of worker militancy is also discussed by Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison in \textit{The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry} (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 166; and Bryant Simon, “Rethinking Why There Are So Few Unions in the South” \textit{Georgia Historical Quarterly} 81(Summer 1997): 477.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Gadsden Daily Times-News}, 19 April 1922.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
abandoned the organization and did not join the walkout for fear of losing their jobs and their homes. The UTWA national leadership, moreover, would not authorize the walkout and rejected the Dwight workers' requests for strike funds, leaving the Dwight local to fight the battle on its own. No outpouring of community support occurred either, as the local press publicized the fact that the strike was unauthorized, and characterized it as "trouble" initiated by outsiders and "parties with sinister motives." Within two days of the walkout, although Dwight officials "did not say whether the additional machinery was operated by returning employes [sic] or [by] help that had been secured from other sources," the mill had enough operatives to run at seventy percent capacity. Wilkinson simply ignored the strikers and hired non-union workers to replace them. By May, the union was broken and Wilkinson had achieved his goal of eradicating the UTWA from the Dwight Manufacturing Company's Alabama City mill.

The purge of the textile union at Dwight's southern branch occurred writ large throughout the textile industry between 1919 and 1922. Wage cuts precipitated worker militancy and management turned the sluggish state of the industry into a union busting tool by closing their mills and selling surplus stocks of goods while waiting out the union and hiring non-union labor to fill positions left vacant by fired union workers. Mill owners throughout the country chipped away at the wartime gains that had been made throughout the textile industry and, by the beginning of 1923, UTWA membership had declined nearly seventy-five percent, hovering at its prewar level. "The cotton barons are drunk with power," UTWA President Thomas McMahon declared, "they are wielding

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46 Ibid., 20 April 1922.
the ax on organization wherever it springs up. They destroy the offices of local unions by putting them on the blacklist, and many of our men and women have trudged from state to state without being able to get employment.”

Lewis Bowen, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alabama State Federation of Labor, lamented that there had never been “such a strong gigantic drive against the Organized Labor Movement” as existed in Alabama by 1921.

The attitude in the greater Gadsden community toward unionized labor soured significantly in the wake of the failed Dwight strike in 1922 and after a successful strike in October 1923 of the Gadsden Brotherhood of Railway Carmen against the Southern Railway’s car works. After driving the union out of its mill, the Dwight Company announced that plans were being drafted for an expansion of the Alabama City facility and the addition of three hundred looms. Later the following year, the Southern Railway granted union recognition to the Gadsden carmen but shortly after the strike settlement, a fire destroyed the car works, and the Southern Railway announced that instead of rebuilding in unionized Gadsden, it would shift its operations to other facilities. The lesson Gadsden residents took from the actions of the Dwight Manufacturing Company and the Southern Railway, was that in a union-free atmosphere industries would invest and re-invest, as Dwight did with its mill expansion and

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50 *Gadsden Daily Times-News*, 13 June 1922. The *Gadsden Daily Times-News* also announced that the Alabama City mill converted its operations from steam to electric, noting that “the decision to electrify the big plant was made some time ago,” and was finally coming to fruition. See *Gadsden Daily Times-News*, 13 December 1924.

improvements, but that companies, like the car works, would avoid areas where organized labor was strong. “If the removal of the car works will bring a realization of what is needed in the way of a co-operative spirit, then it will be a blessing,” declared Gadsden resident O. R. Hood, “[A]s soon as word goes out that there is a wholesome spirit of protective interest for invested capital . . . Gadsden will grow as it has never grown before and there will be no way to stop it.”

In 1923, the communities of Gadsden and Alabama City, and the state of Alabama attempted to reinvigorate their campaigns to attract new investments and manufacturing industries that, during the 1890s, had been successful in inducing the Dwight Manufacturing Company to build its southern branch factory there. While the state established the Department of Commerce and Industries to promote the advancement of agriculture and industry statewide, in an effort to affirm the public image of the Gadsden area as industry-friendly, over one hundred of Gadsden’s “leading business and professional people” signed an “Open Shop Resolution,” in November. “The enemies of organized labor,” according to Lewis Bowen of the Alabama State Federation of Labor, seized on the relocation of the Southern Railway car works after the 1923 fire as an “opportunity and began the slogan of advertising Gadsden as an open shop town.” Returning to a key selling point used at the turn of the century, community promoters sought to advertise Gadsden as a growing industrial city that had an abundance

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52 Gadsden Daily Times-News, 2 November 1923. The Dwight Manufacturing Company, Gulf States Steel, and the Southern Railway car works were the three biggest employers in the greater Gadsden area in the early 1920s. At the time of the 1923 fire and closure, the car works employed 700.

53 In 1927, the state of Alabama also created the Industrial Development Board as a vehicle through which the state would work to secure the establishment of new industries in the state. On the industrial boosterism of the 1920s throughout the South, see James Cobb, The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990, second edition (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 64-70.

of cheap, nonunion labor waiting to be hired. The 1923 resolution proclaimed that through the open shop, “every man and woman in the lawful exercise of his or her natural right to earn a livelihood [would] be protected” but that “the right of outside parties to interfere in matters arising between employee and employer is denied.” Representatives of community groups, including the Gadsden and Alabama City Chambers of Commerce, the Kiwanis Club, the Business and Professional Women’s Club, and the Rotary Club, pledged their support for the open shop movement and established a committee to secure the signatures of all businesspersons not in attendance at the meeting.55 

The Gadsden Central Labor union held a public meeting a week after the passage of the open shop resolution so that the city’s unions could voice their opposition to the open shop movement. At the meeting, the union members in attendance argued that organized labor was not a roadblock to Gadsden’s progress and development, but instead, would help to advance them as strong unions were the only assurance to potential investors that mutual cooperation, not antagonism, would be the foundation of labor-management relations. M. J. Williams of the bricklayers’ union also emphasized the stability that unions provided by noting that organizations set standards by which all members had to abide. Various businesses and professions had “their organizations,” he asserted, and so should labor. Despite protestations to the contrary from the business community, the open shop resolution, according to A. C. Colvin of the carpenters’ union meant “the destruction of organized labor” in Gadsden.56 The city’s unions did not

55 *Gadsden Daily Times-News*, 2 November 1923. Historian Charles Martin argued that Gadsden’s pro-industry, anti-union stance, as evidenced through the 1923 open shop resolution, was a key factor in the 1929 decision of Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company to build a branch factory in Gadsden which would employ 1,500. See Martin, “Southern Labor Relations in Transition: Gadsden, Alabama, 1930-1943.” *Journal of Southern History* 47 (November 1981): 547.

simply acquiesce to the business community’s open shop strategy. Yet, although
commended by the Alabama State Federation of Labor for “the determination shown by
them in resisting the onslaughts of the open shoppers and the advocates of the American
plan of operation,” no new organizational drives were successful in the Gadsden area for
nearly a decade. The remaining unions in the area, primarily those in the skilled trades,
could not thwart the return of the city’s prewar, anti-union status quo.57

“The Solid South,” proclaimed Richard Edmonds of the Manufacturers’ Record in
1924, “means security for every manufacturer trembling under the whiplash of the
anarchistic labor leaders.”58 Postwar open shop campaigns such as the one in Gadsden
were ruinous for the fledgling industrial unions formed during World War I. Overall
union membership declined twenty-five percent between 1920 and 1923, and dropped by
nearly half within a decade. The industry depression of the 1920s compounded the
troubles for textile unions throughout the country. UTWA treasuries were nearly empty
by the end of the 1922 New England strikes, and membership in the United Textile
Workers of America dwindled from a World War I high of ten percent of all textile
workers to less than three percent by 1929.59

Part-time production schedules and ongoing wage cuts made it difficult for textile
workers to afford union dues and for locals to build up funds that could support

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57 Alabama State Federation of Labor, Proceedings of Executive Board and Report of Officers,
and Financial Statement, 1923, 21. Dwight Assistant Treasurer James Thompson mentioned an attempt to
unionize labor in Gadsden in a 16 March 1926 letter to Alabama City Agent Allan Little, noting that he
“sincerely” hoped “the attempt to stop this will be successful,” and urging Little to inform himself of “the
story of the attempt to unionize our Mill help that was made some time ago, and the strike that resulted
therefrom, also the story about the strike due to unionism in the Car Works, which writer understands
abandoned because of labor difficulties.” James Thompson, Assistant Treasurer to Allan Little, Alabama
City Agent, 16 March 1926, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, ME-1.
58 Manufacturers’ Record, quoted in Paul Blanshard, Labor in Southern Cotton Mills (New York:
New Republic, 1927), 74.
59 Bernstein, The Lean Years, 84; Montgomery, The Fall of the House of Labor, 406.
protracted strikes or widespread organizing campaigns. Collective action in the mills throughout the 1920s became primarily defensive in nature, with periodic bursts of activity to protest wage cuts or increased workloads. For many mill managers, it proved more economical to completely close a mill and wait out potential or actual strikes than to give in to union demands, especially those for higher pay. Mill slowdowns and periodic closures created a pool of surplus labor from which mill managers in New England could easily hire operatives to replace striking workers, while these factors, in addition to the glut of southern farmers pushed off the land as wartime cotton prices fell, tempered labor-management conflicts in the Piedmont South. As industry conditions worsened through the decade, one's job was often too valuable to risk by joining a union. Strikes during the 1920s, according to textile union historian Cletus Daniel, were "[U]sually taken as a last resort" as expressions of protest against ongoing degradations of labor standards "with little or no hope of being won."60

Organizing in the textile states of the Piedmont South came to a virtual standstill by 1923. The national leadership of the UTWA, however, was not ignorant of the potential consequences of leaving the southern portion of the industry unorganized, where lower wage rates and longer working hours gave textile manufacturers in the region an advantage over producers operating in New England. "The day is at hand," wrote UTWA President Thomas McMahon a year earlier, "when there must be no North, no South—these terms have been used by the employers to enslave the workers—there

60 Daniel, Culture of Misfortune, 25. See also Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 334-338; Hall, et al., Like a Family, 190-197, 266; Simon, A Fabric of Defeat, 50 and "Rethinking Why There Are So Few Unions in the South," 476. On the movement of southern farmers off the land during the 1920s, see Gilbert Fite, Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), Chapter 5.
can only be one country with the same hours of labor prevailing everywhere." The difficulty, still, was to convince the unionized mill workers in New England that they had a vested interest in helping to bring the unorganized workers in southern mills into the UTWA fold. The local-regional outlook of the majority of New England textile unions that had dominated the UTWA since its inception in 1901, deepened in the early 1920s. Likewise, the greater part of southern textile operatives also assessed their situations in light of local conditions. They did not compare their wages to those of millhands in Massachusetts, but instead, to the earnings made by tenant farmers and other industrial employees in their immediate vicinity, proving itself a significant factor in their indifference toward the UTWA except during moments of labor-management strife. The possibility of beginning a southern organizing campaign continued to be discussed at UTWA and AFL annual conventions but, with no massive grass-roots push from operatives in either the North or South, all plans were tabled until “better conditions” prevailed in the industry.

The textile industry depression, chronic shortages of funds and declining membership, implacable hostility of mill owners toward unions, and the unwillingness of New England locals, many of which were themselves struggling to survive, to support southern organizing initiatives meant that southern operatives remained outside the purview of the UTWA during the 1920s and the disparity of regional wage and hour

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61 Textile Worker, July 1922.  
63 Resolutions regarding the organization of southern textile workers appeared yearly beginning in 1921. See American Federation of Labor Convention Proceedings, and United Textile Workers of America, Proceedings of the... Annual Convention.
conditions continued. The relative strength of UTWA locals in New England, moreover, dwindled as technological changes and the implementation of new machinery in mills throughout the region during wartime eliminated skilled jobs and displaced many of the workers who constituted the foundation of the industry’s union strength. As the decade progressed, “southern competition” as a threat to the future of the Massachusetts textile industry became, as it had been during the 1893 depression, a topic of heated debate between mill owners, unionized workers, and the state.

During the 1920s, textile manufacturers throughout Massachusetts pinpointed three causes of the deterioration of the state’s cotton manufacturing industry: higher wages paid to Massachusetts millhands than to their counterparts in the South, shorter

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hours of work for textile operatives mandated by Massachusetts state law, and the higher
taxes paid on Massachusetts mill properties than those levied in southern states. In the
wake of the 1922 New England textile strikes, the Massachusetts Department of Labor
and Industries found that the average hourly wage for Massachusetts mill operatives was
$.41 compared to $.29 in North Carolina, $.24 in Georgia, $.23 in South Carolina, and
$.21 in Alabama. In the textile states of the Piedmont South, moreover, legislation
regulating working hours in the textile industry was scarce. Compared to Massachusetts
where the forty-eight-hour week had been in effect since 1919, fifty-five hours was the
maximum workweek in South Carolina and sixty hours was the maximum in North
Carolina and Georgia. Alabama had no hours limit beyond stipulations that children
under fourteen years of age could not work at night. The result of the paucity of both
hours regulations and effective enforcement of them was that Massachusetts spindles
operated an average of 165 hours per month in 1922, while monthly spindle operation
averaged 273 hours in North Carolina, 271 hours in South Carolina, 254 hours in
Georgia, and 249 hours in Alabama. According to the Massachusetts Department of
Labor and Industries, the overall result of the wage and hours differentials, in addition to
tax rates estimated to be over forty percent lower in the four leading southern textile
states than in Massachusetts, was a production cost for standard print cloth in

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65 Irwin Feller cited figures showing that eighty-five percent of the difference in production costs
between cotton textile mills in New England and those in the Piedmont South in 1923 were attributable to
lower southern wages. See Irwin Feller, “The Diffusion and Location of Technological Change in the
that the increases in textile wages that occurred during World War I were the key factor in the collapse of
the New England cotton textile industry through the 1920s. Because employers could not take back these
wage increases totally at war’s end, higher wage costs at a time when surplus production continued to drive
profits down created the conditions in which many New England mills could no longer compete with
southern made goods. See Gavin Wright, “Cheap Labor and Southern Textiles, 1880-1930” Quarterly

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Massachusetts of slightly less than $.29 per pound compared to just over $.19 per pound in mills of the Piedmont South.\textsuperscript{66}

A crisis mentality, not seen since the depression years of the 1890s, swept the Massachusetts cotton textile industry in the 1920s. "The past year and a half has been a period almost of panic in our New England cotton mills," noted Robert Amory, President of the National Association of Cotton Manufacturers, "Mill managements, stockholders, and a growing and thoughtful part of our general public have been deeply concerned over their future. . . . there has been practically no new construction. There has not even been sufficient replacement of new machinery to take care of that worn-out."\textsuperscript{67} Between 1920 and 1923, as the building of new mills and expansions of old mills in Massachusetts stagnated, construction in the Piedmont South continued with 221 new mills and expansions in 1921, 480 in 1922, and 469 during the first nine months of 1923.\textsuperscript{68} The southern industry press, meanwhile, trumpeted the news of investments made by Massachusetts textile firms and the movement of spindles to the South, with an estimated $100 million of New England money spent between the summer of 1923 and the summer of 1924 on the purchase of existing southern mills or on the construction of new ones.\textsuperscript{69}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[66] In Massachusetts mills, the cost was $.2893 per pound compared to $.1925 per pound in southern mills. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Labor and Industries, Report of a Special Investigation into Conditions in the Textile Industry in Massachusetts and the Southern States (n.p., 1923), 2, 11; Massachusetts Industrial Commission, Report of an Investigation by the Massachusetts Industrial Commissions of the Conditions Affecting the Textile Industry and the Problem of Unemployment in That and Other Industries (Boston: J. L. Fairbanks and Company, 1930), 14. Irving Bernstein referred to the protective legislation on the books in the southern textile states by the 1920s as "a hollow shell." See Bernstein, The Lean Years, 10.
\item[67] NACM Transactions, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1923, 204-205.
\item[68] Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 75.
\item[69] Ibid., 76. The Southern Textile Bulletin ran numerous articles on the movement of spindles from New England into the southern states between the fall of 1922 and 1923. Among these were notices of the construction of a southern branch by the Appleton Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, the movement of the Lowell Bleachery, and the removal of 30,000 of 184,000 spindles to the South by the Pacific Mills of Lawrence, Massachusetts. See Southern Textile Bulletin, 14 December 1922, 11 January 1923, and 6 September 1923.
\end{footnotes}
"Some New England cotton mill men are hanging on by their teeth to what they have," Richard Edmonds, editor of the Manufacturers' Record, observed in 1925, "... others have given up the unequal struggle and either moves South or liquidates." Not all Massachusetts mill owners, however, were willing to relinquish their New England mills without a fight. But, unlike during the 1893 depression, the strategy of switching from coarse to fine goods production as a means of escaping southern competition was no longer an option. The mainstay of southern mills continued to be the manufacture of coarse cotton goods while limited numbers of New England textile companies converted their production solely to finer goods at the turn of the century. Yet, over time, the making of finer goods expanded in both regions until, by the 1920s, the South mirrored New England in its production of both coarse and fine grades of materials. Now in direct competition with the South in virtually all cotton textile markets, owners of Massachusetts textile companies not only cut wages, increased workloads, and began operating branch factories in the South in attempts to remain profitable, but, as had been done during the depression years of the 1890s, also looked to the Massachusetts state legislature to repeal existing regulatory legislation as the remedy for their problems.

"One of the principal reasons for this rapid growth [in the southern industry] is the assistance our Massachusetts laws have given ... by restricting our hours of work way below theirs," remarked Robert Amory to a 1922 gathering of New England textile owners.

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71 Kane, Textiles in Transition, 31-33; John Cumbler cited the switch made by a large proportion of Fall River, Massachusetts textile manufacturers from fine to coarse goods in 1904 as a significant factor in the decline of the textile industry in that city between the 1920s and the 1950s. After a 1904 mulespinners' strike, many Fall River manufacturers replaced their mule spindles with ring spindles and switched to coarse goods production as a way to eradicate the mulespinners' union from their mills. See Cumbler, Working-Class Community in Industrial America: Work, Leisure, and Struggle in Two Industrial Cities, 1880-1930 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 138-139.
manufacturers. "These laws are fostered by some workers who believe they can get something for nothing," he claimed, "It cannot be." After World War I, Massachusetts House Representative Edith Nourse Rogers and Senators John Weeks and Henry Cabot Lodge introduced bills into Congress meant to establish a federal forty-eight-hour law applicable to workers in the textile industry but were unsuccessful in getting the bills passed. The UTWA had also made an attempt to establish the forty-eight-hour week as standard throughout the industry in 1919. Beginning on 3 February 1919, northern and southern textile operatives participated in walkouts to secure the forty-eight-hour week, but the campaign, which had been sidelined for the duration of the war, was ill-timed. The sudden end of hostilities in Europe, the cancellation of government contracts, and the elimination of extra production shifts weakened the position of the UTWA. Some hours reductions did occur, but they often came as a result of sluggish demand and without corresponding wage increases. The 1919 goal of lowering the hours worked in southern mills where, according to UTWA President John Golden, "the hours of labor are the longest and the conditions are the worst," to forty-eight per week ended in failure.

A key objective of Massachusetts textile mill owners in the face of intensifying southern competition and depression conditions throughout the industry, therefore, remained the repeal of the Bay State's forty-eight-hour law. Paid representatives of individual companies and lobbyists for the Arkwright Club, began a concerted effort to convince the state legislature that revoking the forty-eight-hour law was the only way to

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74 In 1919, the average workweek in the southern textile states was sixty hours compared to forty-eight in Massachusetts and fifty-four in New Hampshire and Rhode Island. John Golden, UTWA President to Frank Morrison, UTWA Treasurer, 26 February 1919, American Federation of Labor, Samuel Gompers
save the Massachusetts industry from ruin. By the action of its own Legislature, cotton manufacturing in Massachusetts is doomed to fold up unless its labor laws are changed," the *American Wool and Cotton Reporter* asserted, "Under the 48 hour law the cotton mills of the State are bleeding to death." Continuance of the law, editors of the *Commercial Bulletin* argued, would be a "very regrettable step and likely to cause a further exodus of New England’s manufacturing facilities." The Arkwright Club succeeded in having bills introduced into the Massachusetts legislature to repeal the forty-eight-hour law throughout the 1920s, trying to persuade representatives that without a change in the law, mills throughout the state would be forced to move their operations to the South or go out of business completely.

Characterizing the threatened mill closures as "a smoke screen to hide the real facts," and members of the Arkwright Club as "members of the most soulless, un-American, plutocratic combination in existence today in these United States," UTWA President Thomas McMahon and textile unionists throughout Massachusetts rallied to confront the industry lobbyists and the wage cuts they threatened if more was not done to change the Massachusetts hours law. While state representatives agreed with the manufacturers that southern competition was a serious issue confronting the Massachusetts textile industry, they deemed that the solution was not to be found by rescinding the forty-eight-hour law. Seemingly taking their cue from the unionists, the

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Papers, Reel 42 (microfilm); Brooks, “The United Textile Workers of America,” 139-140; Goldberg, *A Tale of Three Cities*, 15-18; Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 333. 

For a complete listing of paid lobbyists to the Massachusetts legislature, see Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Lobbyist Section, Dockets of Legislative Agents, 1891-1986. Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, MA.

*American Cotton and Wool Reporter*, quoted in *Textile Worker*, August 1922; *Commercial Bulletin*, 6 January 1923. The article blamed the hours legislation for "killing the goose" that laid the golden egg of New England’s textile manufacturing supremacy.

*Textile Worker*, January 1923; *American Federationist*, vol. 30, no. 1.

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majority of legislators took the position that the standards for Massachusetts should not be lowered but, instead, all interested parties should work toward the goal of raising the hours norms that prevailed in mills throughout the South. The forty-eight-hour law thus remained in place.\textsuperscript{78}

As Bay State textile industry lobbyists continued their fight on Beacon Hill to repeal the forty-eight-hour law and to secure tax-relief legislation but with little success, mill managers throughout Massachusetts embraced wage cuts as the most immediate and viable solution open to them in their struggle to effectively meet southern competition. A new round of cuts swept the mills of the state in January 1925. The Dwight Manufacturing Company announced a ten percent reduction for its Chicopee employees that would take effect on 27 January. Unionized weavers at the Chicopee mill threatened to strike if management carried out the wage cut which came on the heels of a reduction during the summer of 1924 that averaged between nineteen and twenty-five percent. Confident that there would be no union trouble from the workers in Alabama City, Chicopee Superintendent J. F. Batchelor ignored the weavers' strike threat. As was the case with the 1922 Alabama City strike, company officials instituted plans to wait out any collective protest by closing the affected mill, selling the buildup of stock in the

\textsuperscript{78} The Massachusetts legislature revisited the issue of repealing the forty-eight-hour law during the 1923, 1924, 1927, and 1928 legislative sessions, but no action was taken on the subject. In 1930, the Massachusetts Industrial Commission suggested that "the Legislature establish the policy that no new laws shall be enacted that will impose burdens upon the textile industry until the laws of competing states attain the standards of Massachusetts," and that the legislature "take such action as will be conducive in securing the standardization of labor laws in all states and especially to bring about the adoption by all states of a 48-hour law similar to the law in effect in Massachusetts." See Commonwealth of Massachusetts, House and Senate Journals, 1923, 1924, 1927, 1928; Massachusetts Industrial Commission, Report of an Investigation by the Massachusetts Industrial Commissions of the Conditions Affecting the Textile Industry and the Problem of Unemployment in That and Other Industries, 69. For an extended discussion of the 1928 hearings on the forty-eight-hour matter and on the issue of reducing state and local taxes assessed on cotton mills during the late 1920s and 1930s, see Koistinen, "Dealing with Deindustrialization," 104-108, 116-130.
company’s warehouses, and, if necessary shifting production to the uninvolved Dwight branch. The wage concessions made to the Dwight Chicopee operatives in 1922 created the circumstances in which the company could avoid a strike there and break the Alabama City union. In 1925, Dwight management exploited the open shop status quo established at the Alabama City branch three years earlier to challenge its unionized workers in Chicopee.  

On the day the Dwight wage cut was scheduled to go into effect, “before the looms were started . . . the weavers received word [from their union leaders] to leave their places in protest,” and 150 weavers left the Dwight mill in Chicopee, declaring a strike in effect. Soon after the Dwight weavers left their looms, the company announced

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79 The average wage at the Chicopee mill before the January wage cut averaged between twenty-eight and thirty dollars a week. The ten percent reduction would, therefore, affect a weekly wage decrease of about three dollars. Springfield (MA) Republican, 28 January 1925. Communications between Chicopee Superintendent J. F. Batchelor and Alabama City Agent C. S. Wilkinson, were ongoing throughout the strike. See Alabama Agent to Treasurer Letter Book, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-2.
a total mill shutdown and began a lockout the remaining workers employed at the Chicopee mill.\textsuperscript{80} The Chicopee weavers, in spite of the lockout, initially found little support among these operatives. The divisions between the workers of different departments were exacerbated by the fact that the organized workers themselves were members of two competing national bodies. The unionized weavers and loomfixers at Dwight's Chicopee mill belonged to the American Federation of Textile Operatives, while the organized carders, spinners, and pickers claimed affiliation with the United Textile Workers of America. According to UTWA historian Robert Brooks, the two unions viewed each other as "obstructionist" and were unwilling to forego craft and union rivalries to unite, even for the larger purpose of effective organization in individual mills and throughout the textile industry.\textsuperscript{81} When the Chicopee weavers began their walkout, none of the UTWA affiliated Dwight locals declared sympathy strikes in support of them.

Four days after the Dwight lockout began, UTWA officials met in Boston to discuss whether or not to take strike action against the wage cuts made in mills throughout New England. UTWA President Thomas McMahon announced that the union "decided to resist the wage cuts now being made," and that he had "been instructed to get in touch with the officials of all the districts . . . for the purpose of making proper

\textsuperscript{80} Springfield (MA) Republican, 28 January 1925.

\textsuperscript{81} Several craft unions seceded from the United Textile Workers of America in 1915 and formed the rival American Federation of Textile Operatives. Most of these locals eventually transferred their affiliations back to the UTWA between 1923 and 1926. The National Union of Mulespinners remained largely independent even after its amalgamation with the UTWA in 1901. The mulespinners' union did not surrender its AFL charter or its treasury to the UTWA in 1901 and the union formally withdrew in 1914. It remained independent as late as 1929. See Brooks, "The United Textile Workers of America," 182-214, especially 184-196.
arrangements for carrying on this struggle.” Yet no strike authorizations appeared for the UTWA-affiliated Dwight locals who were already locked out of the Chicopee mill.

The weavers faced the prospect of receiving no help from the UTWA unions for the duration of their protest, and their fight became even more challenging because of rifts that existed among the Dwight craft unions affiliated with the American Federation of Textile Operatives. Despite their common membership in the AFTO, the Dwight loomfixers declared themselves “not sympathetic with the striking weavers” because the weavers did not support the fixers when they protested against a 1924 summer wage cut with a short-lived walkout in September. Although locked out of the mill with the rest of the workforce in January 1925, the loomfixers said they were “not interested” in aiding the weavers. The lack of cooperation continued as the weavers’ strike and lockout dragged into its fourth week without any sign that the company was willing to change its policy regarding the wage cut.

Within a week of the initial walkout and shutdown at the Chicopee mill, meetings had occurred between the striking weavers, Dwight mill officials, and two vice-presidents of the AFTO. Superintendent Batchelor stated that the position of the company was that the weavers would “be allowed to return to work . . . under the same conditions as those existing when they went out on strike.” If they chose not to, the mill would remain closed. The weavers refused, the lockout continued, and non-striking Dwight operatives were “obliged to go home again.” Twenty-seven days into the strike, the company partially reopened the mills with the workers who were willing to return. Spurred on by

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82 Springfield (MA) Republican, 1 February 1925.
83 Ibid., 28 January 1925.
84 Ibid., 31 January and 2 February 1925.
the mill starting again and the likelihood that the company would, therefore, operate indefinitely on the reduced pay scale if they let the weavers continue the fight alone, the following day the Dwight locals of the UTWA and the AFTO began cooperating. The UTWA union members and the AFTO loomfixers declared sympathy strikes in support of the weavers. Together, they organized a general strike committee “to represent the employes [sic] of the Dwight mills regardless of union affiliation,” and coordinated pickets for the mill gates. The strike committee also submitted the dispute to the Massachusetts State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration for settlement, demanding from the company recognition of the unions, the end of fines levied on flawed goods, and the reversal of the ten percent wage cut. The day the joint UTWA-AFTO pickets began, the Dwight Chicopee mill operated for the first full day since the weavers’ walkout.85

The Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Chicopee mill ran intermittently as the strike and the picketing continued through March 1925. “We still have the strike with us, but,” Superintendent Batchelor wrote to Alabama City Agent C. S. Wilkinson on his strategy to restart the mill with non-union Dwight operatives and newly hired workers, “are in hopes to see it broken.”86 Union workers, meanwhile, stood at the gates daily to heckle anyone who crossed the union line. “Two women practically threw the makings of an omelet at other women who had gone back to work,” the local press reported of an incident at the end of one shift, “Eggs of a vintage not too recent and pepper and salt were hurled upon the women who had gone back into the mill.”87 Still, the possibility of being permanently replaced by recently hired strikebreakers, the prospect of having to

85 Springfield (MA) Republican, 25 February 1925.
86 J. F. Batchelor, Chicopee Superintendent to C. S. Wilkinson, Alabama City Agent, 4 March 1925, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-2.
87 Springfield (MA) Republican, 11 March 1925.
vacate company housing should their jobs be filled by others, and the economic realities of having been out of work for over a month, compelled more and more Dwight workers to enter the mills. By the end of the March, Superintendent Batchelor informed C. S. Wilkinson in Alabama City that the “situation is much brighter—have 321 looms running today, with the prospects of settlement very bright,” to which Wilkinson replied, “Trust . . . that soon they will see the error of their ways and flock to the mill for work.”

The nine-week strike at the Dwight Company’s Chicopee mill officially ended on 1 April 1925 with a decision from the Massachusetts State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration. “Under the terms of the agreement accepted by the strikers’ committee,” announced State Board member Fred Knight, “no discrimination will be shown against the strikers when they return to the mills.” The unions agreed to return to work on good faith that they would “be given recognition by the officials of the mills after they have gone back to their looms.” Overall, however, the Dwight strikers realized few tangible results from the strike. The State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration gave tacit support for union recognition of the Dwight locals but without establishing a mechanism to ensure that the company would comply with the no-discrimination, union-recognition terms of the agreement. Furthermore, the company system of fining continued, the ten percent wage cut remained in effect, and in any future disputes with management, the agreement required the Dwight unions “before taking a strike vote, to submit any demands for adjustment of working conditions to the mill officials for settlement and

88 J. F. Batchelor, Chicopee Superintendent to C. S. Wilkinson, Alabama City Agent, 31 March 1925; and Wilkinson to Batchelor, 2 April 1925, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MH-2.
investigation.” The following day, J. F. Batchelor noted, “We are running about 1600 looms . . . . the atmosphere has changed.”

As was the case with the 1893 strike at the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Chicopee mill, the 1925 strike proved to be an event that would forever change the company. “To be sure, large mills cannot be moved overnight from one locality to another and there is very considerable expense involved in moving these plants but there is a limit beyond which the managements will refuse to operate in New England,” the Commercial Bulletin editorialized in 1923, “and that limit appears to be very near at hand.” In 1893, the Chicopee strike was an integral factor in the decision made by Dwight’s corporate officers to open a southern branch mill so that Dwight-made goods could remain competitive in the marketplace in the face of growing inter-regional competition and increasingly strict age and hours restrictions passed by the Massachusetts legislature. Thirty years after construction on Dwight’s Alabama City mill began, the strike at the Chicopee mill marked the “limit” for the company. After nearly five years of struggling to make profits at the Chicopee mill, the strike was the catalyst for Dwight’s corporate officers to “take action necessary to carry out a plan for the readjustment of the capital and to raise new money in order to relieve the Company from

89 Springfield (MA) Republican, 1 April 1925. The Commonwealth established the Massachusetts State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration in 1886 with the power to intervene in labor disputes in Massachusetts businesses employing over twenty-five persons. The decisions of the board were binding for six months and thereafter either party involved could file its intention to not follow the terms of the agreement and then do so after sixty-days. No official records of the 1925 Dwight strike remain in the papers of the State Board. For applications, dockets, minutes, and decisions of other Massachusetts strikes submitted for arbitration, see Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, Dockets, Hearings, Minutes, and Decisions. Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, MA.

90 J. F. Batchelor, Chicopee Superintendent to C. S. Wilkinson, Alabama City Agent, 2 April 1925, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection.

91 Commercial Bulletin, 6 January 1923.
its ... strained financial condition." Unable to make payments to the House of Morgan for the 1915-1922 mill overhaul and unwilling to risk the possibility of additional worker militancy with a new round of wage cuts, the corporate officers of the Dwight Company sought a new, more effective way to slash operating costs and maintain the company's liquidity. The result was the decision give up on its investment in mills, manpower, and machinery in Massachusetts, relocate all Dwight operations to its southern facility, and close the parent mill in Chicopee completely.

The permanent shutdown of the Chicopee mill did not happen immediately, but Dwight Company officials began the process of shifting production from its operations in Massachusetts to its Alabama City mill in the spring of 1925. Citing the "extensive rebuilding program, followed by large losses sustained ... during the violent period of liquidation in 1921, from the fact that business since that time has been below normal," in addition to the shortfalls due "to strikes and partial operation," the corporate officers submitted a plan whereby the company would increase its operating capital by floating new stock "to improve the current condition" of the company. During Dwight's financial retooling, the Alabama City mill continued to be a safety-valve and the company depended almost exclusively for its earnings on the sales of the cloth produced there more cheaply than that made in Chicopee. Noting figures which showed that the Chicopee mill registered a net loss of over twenty-seven thousand dollars from 1917 to 1924, while over the course of the same eight year period, the Alabama City mill made a net profit of over two million dollars, Dwight Clerk of Corporation George Nutting, informed company stockholders that "It will be observed that ... [the] Chicopee Mill has

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92 Notice of Special Stockholders Meeting, 10 April 1925, Miscellaneous Prospectus, Dwight Manufacturing Company, Industrial #4. Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard University, Boston,
not been a source of profit to the Company” but “the earnings of the Alabama Mill have averaged . . . 9.9%.”\(^9\) The Chicopee mill continued operations through 1925 and 1926 but the Alabama City mill increased its share of Dwight’s overall production. By November 1925, Dwight officials announced its intention to begin running the Alabama City mill on a day and night basis, requiring the hiring of up to 1,700 more employees there.\(^9\)4

“The earnings of your Company’s plant at Chicopee, Mass. have been, and still are unsatisfactory,” Treasurer George Nichols informed Dwight stockholders, “but the Plant at Alabama City has consistently made money and it is in hope of still further increasing these earnings that the present plan has been adopted.”\(^9\)5 The process of closing the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Chicopee mill gained momentum through 1926 and the company began shipping machinery from Chicopee to Alabama City. “At Chicopee . . . we have considerable machinery in excess of operating requirements,” Treasurer George Nichols informed Alabama City Agent Allan Little, “I recommend that when you have definitely decided what machinery should be replaced in Alabama City that you advise and we would . . . help you out by sending you some machinery in good condition from Chicopee.”\(^9\)6 In October, the Dwight Manufacturing Company bought the

\(^9\)3 George Nutting, Clerk of Corporation to “the Stockholders of Dwight Manufacturing Company,” 16 June 1925, Miscellaneous Prospectus, Dwight Manufacturing Company, Industrial #4. The net loss of the Chicopee mill 1917-1924 was $27,506.43 and the Alabama City profit over the same period was $2,382,589.53. The last year in which the Chicopee mill registered an annual profit was 1919.

\(^9\)4 Gadsden Daily Times-News, 19 November 1925. Dwight Treasurer George Nichols informed Alabama City Agent Allan Little that “We believe that [Dwight selling agent] Minot, Hooper & Co. could sell an increased product without material price disadvantage” with the addition of a night run in Alabama City. George Nichols, Treasurer to Allan Little, Alabama City Agent, 16 February 1926, ME-1.


\(^9\)6 George Nichols, Treasurer to Allan Little, Alabama City Agent, 8 January 1926, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, ME-1.
Essex Cotton Mills in Newburyport, Massachusetts, with the money secured through the issuance of additional stock in 1925, in order to transfer the equipment from that facility to the Alabama City mill as well. The company shipped machinery and carded cotton from Newburyport and Chicopee “in carload lots as fast as ready” to Alabama City through 1927.\textsuperscript{97} During the summer of that year, the Dwight Company began selling its real estate holdings. The first buildings to be sold were the company-owned tenements and boarding houses in Chicopee Center. Described as “one of the largest transfers of central real estate in the history of Hampden County,” on 31 June 1927, the Dwight Company relinquished the titles of all of its real estate holdings, except for the mill buildings themselves, to the Walnut Realty Trust of Chicopee.\textsuperscript{98}

By the start of the new year, the Dwight Manufacturing Company had completely ceased operations at its Chicopee mill. In 1929, Dwight sold the mill buildings to Raphael Sagalyn of Springfield, a member of the Walnut Trust Realty group. Sagalyn formed the Industrial Buildings Corporation with the intention of persuading small industries to locate their production in the old Dwight mills. He was initially unsuccessful in his efforts, and the buildings stood vacant until 1931 when the Berkshire Upholstered Furniture Company opened a small facility in one of the Dwight mill buildings. Through the 1930s, several small manufacturers and needlecraft businesses,

\textsuperscript{97} James Thompson, Assistant Treasurer to J. F. Batchelor, Chicopee Superintendent, 2 June 1927, Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection, MG-34. Numerous letters and railroad shipping receipts documenting the movement of machinery from the Massachusetts mills to Alabama City are located in the Dwight Manufacturing Company Collection. The bulk are located in Treasurer to Agent, Agent’s Copies 1924-1927, MG-34; Agent to Treasurer, Treasurer’s Copies, 1924-1925, 1927, MK-6; and Miscellany to Agent, Second Series, 1927-1928, MM-12.

\textsuperscript{98} Springfield (MA) Republican, 1 July 1927. This sale transferred ownership of over one hundred buildings.
seeking to tap into the skilled textile labor force already in Chicopee and the non-union, low wage workforce there, moved into the Dwight complex.99

Despite the eventual establishment of small industrial concerns within Dwight’s Chicopee mill, the closure of the Dwight Manufacturing Company was, according to Chicopee historian Vera Shlakman, “disastrous.”100 The Dwight Company, one of the city’s four original mills, absorbed two of the others, the Cabot Manufacturing and the Perkins Manufacturing Companies, in 1856. The Chicopee Manufacturing Company, the fourth of the original mills, sold its facilities to Johnson and Johnson for the manufacture of surgical supplies in 1916. The Dwight closure marked the loss of the last of Chicopee’s cotton textile mills.101

The mill shutdown had very real consequences not only for the 2,000 employees of the company who lost their jobs but also for their families, the overwhelming majority of whom depended entirely on earnings from the Dwight mills for their livelihoods. Finding work proved extremely difficult for the out-of-work Dwight operatives. Because of the ongoing industry-wide depression, few positions were available in other textile

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101 Szetela, History of Chicopee, 131-132.
mills in the Chicopee-Springfield-Holyoke area. After spending their entire lives working in the textile industry, many Dwight operatives struggled to learn the skills necessary to find work elsewhere. For those who did find work, their lack of seniority often made them the first to be laid-off as businesses and industries throughout the region curtailed their operations during the Great Depression. Historian Katherine Du Pre Lumpkin noted that fifty-eight percent of the “displaced” textile workers in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts in 1934 were former employees of three companies, including Dwight, that were “active outside the State,” or were “themselves operating plants elsewhere,” while their Massachusetts mills were “dismantled and for sale.”

The city of Chicopee also lost its largest employer and taxpayer, and businesses throughout the city saw a substantial loss of income because of the large number of unemployed textile workers. As an absentee owner, however, the implications of the mill shutdown for the city of Chicopee was an insignificant factor in the Dwight Company’s decision to move all of its operations to Alabama City. For many years, a vocal minority of Chicopee citizens criticized the Boston-based Dwight Company for its lack of interest in the well being of the city. “If those absentee capitalists could be compelled to live on . . . any of the streets between Front and Exchange streets,” a local Methodist minister blasted from his pulpit in 1917, “we would be assured that that entire section of our city would change appearance . . . . No local person is responsible for conditions at the

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Dwight manufacturing company. Indeed, profits, not community welfare, drove the decision-making process of the Dwight officers in Boston. Corporate responsibility extended to Dwight shareholders and creditors but not to its employees or to the community of Chicopee. The closure of the Dwight Manufacturing Company caused a “general economic demoralization” of the city that only deepened with the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. It would be thirteen years before the small industries which moved into the old Dwight buildings could replace the 2,000 jobs lost when the mill ceased production.

The suspension of the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Chicopee operations in 1927 was one of a growing number of textile mill closures that occurred throughout

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103 Springfield (MA) Republican, 12 March 1917.
104 Vera Shlakman, “Economic History of a Factory Town,” 229. Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison referred to the impact of a company closure on an entire town, not just the workers who were directly affected by the loss of a job, as a “ripple effect.” See, Bluestone and Harrison, The
Massachusetts by the end of the decade. The 1920s were difficult years throughout the textile industry, but lower production costs in the South meant that most Piedmont mills, while not always able to pay regular dividends to their stockholders, survived. Increasing numbers of their counterparts in New England, at the same time however, slipped into bankruptcy. In spite of the industry-wide depression, textile mills in the Piedmont South continued to expand, increasing their share of total textile workers in the nation from forty-six percent to sixty-eight percent between 1923 and 1933. Within the same time period, forty percent of all New England textile manufactories closed, resulting in the unemployment of over half of the region’s textile industry workforce. The southern textile states supplanted New England as the leading textile manufacturing region in the U.S., topping the number of wage earners and value of products manufactured in 1923, the number of active spindles in 1925, the number of total spindles in place in 1927, and the number of looms by 1931.105

“In Massachusetts many cotton mills have definitely gone out of business, others are discontinuing operations, and still others are in the process of liquidation,” the Massachusetts Industrial Commission noted in 1930, “Most of the coarse goods business has gone from Massachusetts; only a greatly reduced proportion of the medium weight cotton goods business remains; and the fine cotton goods business is increasingly being taken over by other states.”106 Over twenty-two thousand Massachusetts textile

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employees lost their jobs between 1920 and 1933, as ninety-three Massachusetts mills permanently closed their doors in the Bay State, of which eleven mills, including the Dwight Manufacturing Company, were owned by textile corporations with southern branches. At the peak of the state’s 1920-1933 wave of mill closures between 1926 and 1931, seventy-one Massachusetts mills suspended operations.107 Throughout the 1920s, an estimated 3.8 million spindles ceased to operate in the mills of New England as fifty-one textile factories, containing more than 1.3 million spindles moved south, with an additional 2.5 million spindles stopped by mill owners who shut down their operations completely. In 1923, Massachusetts had 191 cotton textile mills, employing 114,000 workers, but by 1929, the Bay State’s leading industry had shrunk to 135 mills, employing 71,000.108

The southern textile industry press described the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s permanent closure of its Chicopee operations as “an industrial tragedy” brought about by labor legislation and unions which kept the Dwight mills in “constant

107 Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries, Division of Statistics, Record of Cotton Mills in Massachusetts Which Went Out of Existence During 1921-1934 Exclusive, 1. The closed mills with southern branches include the Dwight Manufacturing Company and its subsidiary the Essex Cotton Mills, Bay State Cotton Mills, New England Southern Mills (Lowell Division), International Cotton Mills, American Tire Fabric Company, Firestone Mills, Massachusetts Cotton Mills, Beaver Mills, Beacon Manufacturing Company, and Gagner Manufacturing Company. The report does not indicate whether or not the owners of the closed mills without southern branches reinvested in the South or got out of the textile industry all together. The largest of the mills without southern branches that closed included the Lancaster Mills (101,000 spindles), Lyman Mills (123,000 spindles), Manomet Mills (318,000 spindles), Fairhaven Mills (155,000 spindles), Sharp Manufacturing Company (200,000 spindles), Everett Mills (143,000 spindles), and Hamilton Manufacturing Company (160,000 spindles). The Tremont and Suffolk Mills of Lowell was acquired by the Nashua Manufacturing Company and downsized from 223,000 to 40,000 spindles during the same time period.

turmoil and made operations irregular." In reality, however, Massachusetts laws and the presence of organized labor in mills throughout the state were not the primary problems leading the Dwight Company to build a southern branch factory in the 1890s or to the decision to move all of its production to Alabama in the 1920s. The root of the troubles for Massachusetts textile mills, which became evident during the depression years of the 1890s and facilitated increasing numbers of New England mill owners to relocate their operations to the Piedmont South in the 1920s, was the widespread entrance of southern-made cotton textile goods in the marketplace during the 1880s. As southern competition intensified through the turn of the century, labor standards established at the behest of unionized workers in Massachusetts through collective action at the statehouse and their workplaces had a significant impact on the wage and hour differentials between mills in the North and South, aggravating the underlying challenges presented by southern competition.

By the 1920s, southern competition had been an issue with which New England mill owners and unionists alike had been grappling for over thirty years, and neither state or federal labor legislation nor a strong inter-regional textile union had developed to equalize the regional disparities in working hours and wages. The textile depression of the 1920s created the conditions within which New England mill owners could no longer make profits because of the lack of parity in production costs between North and South, and the reality of southern competition and its bearing on the possibility of a long-term future for the New England cotton textile industry truly made itself known. Within the context of the industry-wide depression, the wage and hour differentials that existed between the regions, and the higher numbers of unions in the New England mills

compared to those in the South, exerted a push on mill owners there to relocate South while the combination of “advantages” in the form of cheap and unorganized labor, low taxes, and the pro-business climate created by state and local governments pulled them southward.

The reality of this situation by the 1920s was that new construction and expansions of mills in Massachusetts became “more or less a curiosity,” and the acceleration of the decline of the region’s textile industry began.\footnote{N ACM Transactions, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1926, 46.} “We find the South rapidly developing . . . New England is only standing still, if we are even maintaining our own,” Norman Case, Governor of Rhode Island, pointed out to the members of the National Association of Cotton Manufacturers.\footnote{Ibid, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1928, 148.} The leadership of the UTWA, meanwhile, chastised mill managers for their greed, arguing that they could still make money in the Bay State but chose to close their mills and relocate so that they could make higher profits on the backs of poorly paid, unorganized southern operatives. “It will do the New England section no harm,” goaded UTWA President Thomas McMahon in his ongoing war-of-words with mill owners, “if these jelly fish backboned incompetents moved to some other part of our country where they can carry on the exploitation of women and children for the sake of dividends.”\footnote{Textile Worker, November 1927.} Industry spokesmen responded that textile unionists were to blame for driving them out of business through strikes and the passage of restrictive labor legislation. Yet, as Massachusetts textile mill owners and the UTWA continued to exchange mutual recriminations about the sorry condition of the state’s textile industry, the Great Depression began, and textile workers North and South

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] N ACM Transactions, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1926, 46.
\item[111] Ibid, Semi-Annual Meeting, 1928, 148.
\item[112] Textile Worker, November 1927.
\end{footnotes}
once again embraced the possibility of bringing about change through collective action and inter-regional cooperation.
CHAPTER VI

"THERE IS MORE DISSATISFACTION AMONG LABOR NOW THAN I HAVE EVER SEEN:" THE 1934 GENERAL TEXTILE STRIKE AND THE DWIGHT MANUFACTURING COMPANY

"The conditions in many parts of New England are nothing short of tragic, not only from the textile workers’ point of view . . . but also from the point of view of entire cities and towns where textile mills exist," UTWA President Thomas McMahon told journalist Louis Adamic in 1931. “[M]ost of the mill towns,” McMahon continued, “are sad, sad places.” As the textile industry depression of the 1920s gave way to a nationwide depression by 1929, textile workers throughout New England, still reeling from the mill closures and movements to the South that occurred throughout the decade, saw their working and living conditions go from bad to worse, as short-time production, shutdowns, and layoffs ravaged the region. By the winter of 1931, an estimated forty percent of the 280,000 textile operatives in New England were unemployed, while the majority of those who still had jobs worked only one or two days a week.¹ Mill operatives in the Piedmont South also felt the pinch of the Great Depression as management, seeking to cut production costs to the bone, slashed wages and the numbers of workers on company payrolls, pushing those employees who remained in the mills to the breaking point by speeding-up machinery and increasing workloads. As conditions throughout the textile industry worsened, southern mill operatives sought redress for their grievances through collective action and the mandate for change they saw as implicit in

New Deal legislation, ushering in an unprecedented period of worker militancy in the industry and the possibility for the creation of a viable national textile union. Mill hands’ hopes and frustrations climaxed in 1934, resulting in the largest general strike in the history of American labor. Yet, no fundamental alteration of the low-wage, non-union, management-dominated status quo occurred in the southern textile industry, and New England mill closures and removals to the Piedmont South continued apace. Within the context of the ongoing regional relocation of the American textile industry, the 1934 General Textile Strike would prove itself remarkably unremarkable.

Throughout the 1920s, the United Textile Workers of America experienced a serious erosion of its membership base. Open shop drives in mills nationwide, coupled with the depressed condition of the industry, did away with the organizational gains that the union made during World War I. In New England but especially in Massachusetts, the UTWA watched its largest center of unionized operatives deteriorate as owners liquidated the holdings of mill after mill, and invested their monies instead in manufactories located below the Mason Dixon Line. Seeking to shore-up its northeastern union base in the face of mill closures, wage cuts, and union busting, as early as 1923, the UTWA’s national leadership proposed a strategy whereby it would join in a partnership with management, and in exchange for union recognition, would work toward a common goal of achieving lower labor costs and increased output so the mills could more efficiently meet southern competition. “[T]he greatest future source of increased efficiency, higher production and lower cost lies through a new and better relationship between employer and employee,” maintained one textile unionist, “To replace distrust and antagonism by mutual confidence and co-operation would . . . do more to place the
New England textile industry in a position of advantage in relation to the South than any other occurrence.\textsuperscript{2} Selling itself as an organization that could allay potentially costly labor-capital disputes, the UTWA hoped that it would not only buttress its locals throughout New England but help save a rapidly declining regional industry as well.\textsuperscript{3}

The UTWA had little success with its union-management cooperation strategy. The overwhelming majority of New England mill owners rejected any notion of union recognition, let alone allowing organized labor a say in the day-to-day management of mills or in a company's overall corporate strategy.\textsuperscript{4} Thus for textile unionists in New England, the issues of southern competition, the cost-cutting measures owners implemented to combat it, and runaway mills remained. With no organizational base to speak of in the leading southern textile states, the UTWA found itself powerless to bring southern wages and hours standards into line with those dominant in New England.

The UTWA, however, recoiled from the prospect of a southern organizing campaign. Depression conditions, limited funds, a vast reserve of labor wanting work in the southern mills, and the hostility of employers and the local and regional press to unions of any kind, made the odds against the UTWA and the successful organization of the southern workforce seem too high. But, by the end of the 1920s, textile mill operatives throughout the Piedmont South began challenging management in a series of uncoordinated strikes undertaken by "homegrown" unions to protest the degradation of

\textsuperscript{2} *Textile Worker*, April 1923.
\textsuperscript{4} The national leadership of the AFL and the UTWA praised the Naumkeag Mills of Salem, Massachusetts for their participation in a union-management cooperative agreement and used this company as an example of how the plan could work effectively. *Textile Worker*, March 1930; Jean Carol Trepp, "Union-Management Cooperation and the Southern Organizing Campaign" *Journal of Political Economy* 41(1933): 616-617; American Federation of Labor, *Report of Proceedings of the Fiftieth Annual Convention*, 1930, 86-87.
labor standards they experienced through the stretching-out of their workloads and years of wage reductions. This outburst of union militancy in the mills throughout Tennessee and North and South Carolina offered the UTWA a chance to put the failures of all its previous attempts to unionize the Piedmont South behind and look forward to the possibility of establishing a union beachhead in the region. “The advantage which the South has had in its freedom from labor disputes is beginning to decline,” the Massachusetts Industrial Commission announced, citing figures for 1929 showing that in the “cotton-growing states” there were 16,331 workers involved in thirty-four strikes while in New England there were 4,366 affected in thirty strikes. The moment was right for the UTWA to tap into the anger and frustrations felt by southern operatives, and to begin the concerted organizing campaign that had been put on the backburner since 1922. The union hoped to equalize regional conditions by its presence in mills throughout the region. “The Southern workers are now ready for organization,” UTWA President Thomas McMahon noted after a 1927 strike at the Harriet Mill in Henderson, North Carolina, “Many localities are clamoring for organizers. A new era in the South is about to dawn.”

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5 Mill workers used the term “stretch-out” to describe the managerial practice of increasing the number of looms or spindles assigned to an individual operative, usually with no increase in pay. Textile mill management used the stretch-out through the 1920s and 1930s to cut labor costs by increasing production output without having to augment the workforce. In numerous mills, the stretch-out was also used as a way to downsize a workforce without slowing production. In 1925, UTWA President Thomas McMahon noted that within two decades, the number of looms a weaver tended increased “from six and eight to an individual to thirty-six and forty-eight, and in some instances to seventy-two with an increase in the speed of the loom.” Textile Worker, September 1925.


7 Textile Worker, February 1928. The largest and most publicized of these strikes occurred in Henderson, Gastonia, and Marion, North Carolina, and Elizabethon, Tennessee. For detailed information on the 1927-1929 strikes, see Tom Tippett, When Southern Labor Stirs (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World (1987; reprint Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 201-217; Bernstein, The Lean
By 1928, the fever of organizing spread to unionists in Alabama as well. “Considering the number of employees in the mills of this district and the conditions under which they work,” Earle Parkhurst, organizer for the Alabama State Federation of Labor, noted, “the most need for organization of any craft in Anniston and Gadsden... is for the organization of these people.” The UTWA, however, initially limited its attention to the locales where spontaneous walkouts occurred, seeking to assume leadership before other unions, like the communist-led National Textile Workers Union, could. Places such as the Dwight mill in Alabama City where the union had been broken at the beginning of the decade and the workers did not reorganize, therefore, remained open-shop bastions. A year after his initial call for organization among the mill workers of the Gadsden area, Parkhurst declared that “conditions there are fast becoming unbearable and right under our very noses in our own state we are allowing a menace to survive which will soon class along with Elizabethton, Herrin, and other hell-holes of the past.”

It would not be until the AFL’s 1929 annual convention that UTWA delegates introduced a resolution to authorize the national leadership of the AFL to raise funds for an all-out southern organizing drive. Arguing that the time was right to address the long-standing grievances of long hours, low wages, the stretch-out, and poor living and

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9 Ibid., 1929, 119.
working conditions in mill villages thought the South, the AFL would spearhead the regional unionization campaign and, because it was the South’s largest industry, would focus its efforts on helping the UTWA organize the textile workforce there. The AFL’s Executive Council called for a strategizing conference to be held in November, and at this meeting, delegates set January 1930 as the start date for the southern organizing drive. The planning committee called on each AFL-affiliated union to supply at least one organizer for the drive and to give financial contributions from their union treasuries to aid the cash-poor UTWA. The planners also decided to direct the campaign through a coordinating committee headquarters to be located in one southern city. AFL President William Green announced at the two-day opening convention of the southern organizing drive held in Charlotte, North Carolina on 6 and 7 January 1930 that, because of the strong union presence in the city’s skilled trades and in the surrounding coal mining areas, the coordinating committee would be located in Birmingham, Alabama. Green named AFL organizer Paul Smith, UTWA Vice-President Francis Gorman, and W. C. Birthright of the Tennessee State Federation of Labor as leaders of the Birmingham-based Southern Organizing Committee.\footnote{Bernstein, \textit{The Lean Years}, 33-34; Trepp, “Union-Management Cooperation in the Southern Organizing Campaign,” 612-613.}

From the outset, differences of opinion about the most effective means for organizing the textile industry’s workforce infected the southern drive and threatened to undermine the entire campaign. Southern UTWA delegates at the Charlotte kick-off convention urged a militant organizing strategy, arguing that any other tactic would be doomed to failure because of the fervently anti-union attitudes held by the region’s textile mill owners. AFL President William Green, however, urged a more conservative
approach, championing a union-management cooperation strategy and a campaign based not on directly challenging employers through strike actions but, instead, on trying to win over employers and the public by couching the AFL-affiliated unions as conservative, respectable, and concerned with helping management meet its goals of efficient, profitable production. The 1920s history of failed strikes and the empty treasuries that resulted remained fresh in the minds of many, especially among New Englanders, mitigating support for an aggressive approach to the campaign. These factors, when coupled with Green’s argument that southern textile mill owners would accept the UTWA as a common sense alternative to more radical groups like the communist-led NTWU, meant that the conservative strategy won the day.\textsuperscript{11} Green toured the South through 1930 to acquaint managers, workers, and the public alike with his message of cooperation, and AFL consulting engineer, Geoffrey Brown, approached individual textile mill owners with detailed information on how to establish workable systems of union-management cooperation in their manufactories.\textsuperscript{12}

“In Alabama and Georgia our locals are growing in leaps and bounds,” reported UTWA organizer W. A. Livingston from Huntsville, Alabama, “The people are flocking to the union in droves where we have our organization started . . . . Never before in the

\textsuperscript{11} The National Textile Workers Union took charge of the locally initiated 1929 strike at the Loray Mill in Gastonia, North Carolina, and Green tried to use this example of the communist NTWU stepping into the non-union vacuum to secure UTWA recognition in mills throughout the region. On the Gastonia strike, see Hall, et al., \textit{Like a Family}, 214-15; Dorothy Myra Page, \textit{Southern Cotton Mills and Labor} (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1929).

\textsuperscript{12} Trepp, “Union-Management Cooperation in the Southern Organizing Campaign,” 613-619; Bernstein, \textit{The Lean Years}, 34; Daniel, \textit{Culture of Misfortune}, 35. Geoffrey Brown based his proposals on information obtained by him through a survey of the operations of cotton, silk, rayon, woolen, jute, mattress felt, knitting, and braiding mills, and bleacheries and finishing plants throughout the South. See Geoffrey Brown, \textit{Industrial Survey of Southern Textile Area: Comprising States of Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia} (Birmingham: Birmingham Printing Company, 1930). For an example of the types of addresses given by Green and members of the Southern Organizing Committee see “Address of Francis J. Gorman, VP of the UTWA, Member of Southern Organizing Committee at Chapel Hill Institute on Human Relations, in \textit{Textile Worker}, April 1931.
history of the South have the textile employees shown such determination to form an
organization. 13 During the spring of 1930, the southern organizing drive reached the
open shop haven of Gadsden and the UTWA successfully organized the 375 employees
of the Sauquoit Spinning Company located there. 14 By September, the AFL claimed that
the southern drive had succeeded in establishing thirty-one new UTWA affiliated unions
out of the 112 total new AFL locals formed in the region. But, while the unionization
drive was able to organize locals in a handful of southern textile mills, it did not meet the
ambitious expectations of many in the UTWA. Southern mill owners rejected the AFL’s
union-management cooperation message outright, and the UTWA failed to rouse to
action more than a small minority of the potential rank-and-file throughout the region. 15
Indeed, David Clark, editor of the Southern Textile Bulletin, immediately characterized
the AFL effort as “nothing more or less than a grandstand play,” adding that “before it
attempts to organize southern textile mills,” the UTWA “should be forced to speak of
their record in New England . . . one of failure from every standpoint except the
collection of dues.” 16

The Birmingham coordinating office, likewise, found its resources quickly
strained, as the financial and manpower support pledged by delegates of AFL unions
nationwide at the opening of the southern campaign failed to materialize. An average of
only forty organizers, five working directly for the UTWA, were in the field between
January 1930 and September 1931, even though union leaders proposed the use of over

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13 Textile Worker, November 1930.
14 The UTWA also organized locals in Huntsville and Anniston, Alabama and across the state
boarder in Columbus, Georgia. Textile Worker, June-November 1930; Irons, Testing the New Deal, 32.
15 Bernstein, The Lean Years, 35.
one hundred at the November 1929 planning session. Organizers also made few
inroads in the region’s textile industry as mill owners, refusing to surrender any
advantages they had by virtue of being able to work their employees longer and pay them
less than their counterparts in New England, did not willingly accept any form of
organization in their mills that they did not directly control, no matter how conservative.
The deepening of the nationwide depression, moreover, only strengthened management’s
determination to maintain complete control over decisions concerning wages, hours, and
workloads. Southern mill owners refused to recognize or negotiate with the newly
organized UTWA locals, and thus, the union had no real bargaining power. Mill
supervisors stymied additional membership gains by regularly discharging the leaders of
local unions and evicting them from company housing, making them examples of what
would happen to anyone who joined or would not renounce their union membership. As
1931 began, the organizing campaign was short of money and organizers, and worsening
economic conditions fueled new rounds of production cuts and mill closures throughout
the country. The January 1931 failure of a highly publicized strike, which resulted in a
staggering UTWA defeat at the Dan River Mills in Danville, Virginia, marked the
unofficial end of the AFL’s 1930 organizing campaign in the textile mills of the
Piedmont South.

17 The number of organizers working for the southern campaign varied from month to month.
Irving Bernstein placed the total number of organizers at twenty-one, while George Tindall stated “the
organizing committee usually had about forty, never more than eighty organizers.” The initial number of
organizers proposed at the November 1929 planning meeting was 105. Bernstein, The Lean Years, 35;
Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 376.
18 Bernstein, The Lean Years, 36-41; Trepp, “Union-Management Cooperation in the Southern
Organizing Campaign,” 620-624; Hall, et al., Like a Family, 217-219, 235-236; Daniel, Culture of
Misfortune, 37; Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 377; George Mitchell, Textile Unionism and the
South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 81-82. Irving Bernstein blamed the failure
of the southern organizing campaign in large part on the fact that southern mill owners were
“pathologically opposed to collective bargaining.”
“The textile workers’ situation at the moment is due not only or even mainly to the current business depression,” UTWA President Thomas McMahon lamented in 1931, “but is for the most part a result of immensely complicated and chaotic forces within the textile industry itself, which have worked against them in a cruel conspiracy, and over which they as individuals or even we as a union have no control.”

McMahon admitted that in the face of employer resistance and depressed economic conditions, the AFL’s campaign to organize southern mill hands and to raise their working standards through widespread unionization had failed. The UTWA’s New England base, meanwhile, continued to dwindle, and the union struggled to maintain its core there. By 1930, one of every five textile workers in the country, because of ongoing mill closures and layoffs due to the stretch-out and the depression, was unemployed. Prices and demand for textile goods continued to fall and profits in the industry nearly ceased to exist between 1930 and 1931, even in the South, as mills throughout the country ran at a fraction of their productive capacities. Within two years of the 1931 Danville defeat, the UTWA’s national membership had dropped below 32,000, the lowest in the union’s history.

As textile operatives embraced organization as the means through which they could combat the worst effects of the depression, so too did northern and southern manufacturers as they sought ways to bring health back to the trade. Many textile manufacturers had realized by the early 1920s that the standard practice of cutting costs and increasing production in an attempt to undersell competitors did little more than create a condition where supply outpaced demand, resulting in flooded markets, even lower prices, and a viscous cycle of overproduction. “In an industry such as ours,

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cooperation through an association is absolutely vital. We must realize that the cotton manufacturing industry is... divided into many units, no one mill or group of mills controls over five percent of the production of cotton goods,” noted National Association of Cotton Manufacturers President Robert Amory. “With such intense competition,” he implored, “it is important that some of its bitterness be avoided... for the general good of the industry.” The fundamental problem, however, was that no workable system was in place to regulate the output of the hundreds of individual mills scattered throughout the country. While condemning the prevailing system of cutthroat competition, mill owners, risking the loss of their place in the market, would not voluntarily curtail production unless all other mills did the same. Until some way of coordinating output could be developed and enforced industry-wide, the inherently destructive price wars would continue to the detriment of textile mill owners and workers alike.

Seeking to find possible solutions to the industry’s troubles, in 1926, mill owners created the Cotton Textile Institute. Described as “a cooperative effort to obtain an intelligent grasp of the market problems of cotton manufacturers,” the goal of the CTI was to control the production and pricing of manufactured textile goods. By the end of its first year, the trade association represented an estimated fifteen million spindles nationwide. Hoping that it could mitigate the effects of southern competition on the


northern portion of the industry, New England manufacturers praised the CTI for the "closer cooperation between manufacturers" that the organization facilitated, noting that it had "become generally recognized that our problems are no longer sectional, but are national." In 1930, the CTI focused its efforts on setting production standards through the establishment of ceilings for hours of mill operation, proposing in January that mills limit their operation to day shifts of no more than fifty-five hours per week, and night shifts of no more than fifty hours a week. Nine months later, the association also called for the elimination of night work for women and all workers under eighteen years old. Owners of cotton textile mills representing over eighty percent of the industry's spindles nationwide claimed they participated in the CTI's hours limitation initiatives by 1932.

The Cotton Textile Institute succeeded in getting many of the cotton textile mills in the United States to observe their hours restrictions, but the production standards did little to alleviate the distress felt throughout the industry and fundamentally fix the problems that plagued it. As participation in the CTI's programs was voluntary, individual mills could ignore the association's standards and often did. Some mill owners did not cooperate with the Institute at all, while others only complied intermittently, setting their own production standards when periodic changes in market conditions made it favorable to do so. For New England's textile manufacturers, the CTI's recommendations did little to alter their mill operations. Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire already had laws that set age and hour standards that were at

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25 Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 362-363; Hodges, *New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry*, 18; Irons, *Testing the New Deal*, 56. Tindall cited figures showing that by June 1931, about eighty-five percent of the spindles in the industry cooperated with the night work ban and that about eighty-two percent of the spindles in the industry complied with the 55-50 hour limitations by January 1932.
or below the fifty-five-hour day-work recommendation made by the CTI, and age and hours laws had significantly curtailed night work throughout New England years before. Southern compliance with CTI proposals did marginally decrease overall output, but for New Englanders, the fact remained that textiles made in southern mills continued to be able to undersell theirs because of the higher wages paid and shorter hours worked in the northern mills. “If, as is expected, these voluntary limitations of working hours will be largely adopted,” the Massachusetts Industrial Commission commented on the CTI’s hours recommendations, “they represent excellent moves in the right direction though it will still leave Massachusetts as the only state with a limit of forty-eight hours per week.”26 The CTI’s restrictions, moreover, were not severe enough, even if there had been one hundred percent participation, to stop the perpetual glut of supply and to raise prices. Because of its limited successes, after Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s inauguration in 1933, the CTI embraced the possibility of using federal legislation to help them effect the changes in production standards that had been an impossibility under a system of voluntary, self-regulation.27

The goal of some of the first legislation drafted as part of the New Deal was to stem the tide of the Great Depression by stabilizing industrial production and putting people back to work in an attempt to increase purchasing power nationwide. On 16 June 1933, Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act to meet these objectives. The National Recovery Administration, established to oversee the implementation of the NIRA, would give government backing to and force compliance with the types of

27 Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 362; Irons, New Deal Labor Policy, 49.
restrictions recommended by the Cotton Textile Institute since 1926. Title I of the NIRA authorized the establishment of trade associations and mandated them to establish codes of fair competition for each individual industry throughout the country. In effect, the NIRA sanctioned by federal law the restriction of trade and competition through the fixing of prices, wages, and production schedules. As a tradeoff for this relaxation of anti-trust laws for the benefit of the business community, the NIRA, however, also included Section 7(a) which stipulated that each code should contain provisions ensuring the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively through unions of their own choosing. Representatives of the cotton textile industry, working under the supervision of NRA director Hugh Johnson, drafted the first code.²⁸

The Cotton Textile Code, scheduled to go into effect by 1 August 1933, set the maximum hours a mill could run weekly to two shifts of no more than forty hours each, established a minimum weekly wage for a forty-hour week of twelve dollars in the South and thirteen dollars in the Northeast, outlawed the employment of anyone under sixteen years of age, placed limits on mill expansions and the installation of new machinery, allowed for further production restrictions with approval from the NRA director, and in Article VIII of the code, included the provisions for employee representation as stipulated in Section 7(a) of the NIRA.²⁹ It was evident from the start, however, that organized labor would have virtually no voice in the process of writing or administering the Cotton Textile Code. Mill owners who had been leaders of the now defunct Cotton Textile


²⁹ The Cotton Textile Code actually went into effect on 17 July 1933.
Institute, in effect, became the members of Cotton Textile Industrial Committee that drafted the code, as well as of the Code Authority, chaired by former CTI head George Sloan and established to oversee its provisions within the NRA. The national leadership of the UTWA, nonetheless, embraced the industry code as they assumed that the union would see long-term membership gains from Section 7(a) and would achieve organizational stability through its support of the Roosevelt administration and New Deal initiatives. The union also hoped that mill operatives would be put back to work and benefit from the code’s wage and hour provisions, and that the new standards would help realize the union’s goal of equalizing conditions between New England and the South.30

The Cotton Textile Code did help bring North-South wage and hour standards closer than they had ever been before. Between October 1933 and March 1934, the code reduced the average hours worked throughout the industry by twenty-five percent, as southern mills significantly curtailed operations from previous operating schedules of up to 110 hours per week. The minimum wage stipulations of the code also worked to bring regional wages into line with one another. Southern mill owners often attacked the wage provisions, which hit them much harder than their New England counterparts, as potentially damaging to the region’s recently established dominance in the industry. “Operation of existing codes . . . are in favor of the New England mills and against Southern mills,” opined one southerner, “This shifting in the tide of textile development is of intense concern to the South . . . . This tide flowed strong for a good many years with the result that the South finally wrested supremacy from New England . . . . To

30 Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 435; Hodges, New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 54; Hall, et al., Like a Family, 289.
surrender this supremacy to New England would be to work a colossal injustice."

Despite the one dollar per week regional wage differential, the Cotton Textile Code increased the average hourly earnings throughout the industry by sixty-seven percent and decreased the North-South wage differential to its lowest point. Immediately before the code went into effect, wages earned by cotton textile operatives in the North were nearly thirty-nine percent higher than those in the South. The code reduced this disparity to eighteen percent by early 1934.

While the Cotton Textile Code briefly succeeded in raising wages for many cotton mill operatives and helped to increase demand and raise prices for cotton textile goods, as early as October 1933, demand stagnated, prices dropped below the cost of production, and mill warehouses throughout the country quickly accumulated inventories of surplus stock. Overproduction continued even though southern mills had significantly curtailed operations according to the eighty hour per week maximum set in the code, as many textile mills in New England began operating on increased production schedules in a bid to replace the goods that would have been on the market had mills in the South continued to run on a day-night basis for over one hundred hours a week. The Code Authority, with the approval of Hugh Johnson, attempted to fix the situation by curtailing production further. The new operating schedule of a maximum sixty hours per week went into effect in November 1933 and was scheduled to last ninety days. By the beginning of 1934 though, the Cotton Textile Code had not been able to stabilize the industry. The code

\[^{31}\] Gadsden Times, 3 April 1934.
\[^{32}\] Hodges, New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 56-57; Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 436.
\[^{33}\] George Tindall noted that the combination of higher cotton prices created by New Deal programs under the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), the addition of AAA cotton processing taxes, and the increased wages mandated by the Cotton Textile Code all contributed to driving up the costs of cotton textile production between 1933 and 1934. See Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 438.
restrictions were still not severe enough to bring production into line with demand. In practice, the code failed to meet the expectations of NRA officials, the Cotton Code Authority, and of individual mill owners throughout the country. It also failed to measure up to the hopes of the nation’s textile operatives, especially the thousands who poured into the ranks of the United Textile Workers of America under its collective bargaining provisions.34

The Cotton Textile Code did not put people back to work at wages higher than those earned before, and in fact, often had the opposite effect. The standardization of production schedules initially translated into jobs for many, especially for New England operatives who had been laid-off and for those who had jobs but worked in mills that were open only one or two days a week. Nevertheless, as prices stagnated and the Code Authority curtailed maximum weekly production hours to sixty during the autumn of 1933, large numbers of New England’s cotton textile workforce who had been put back to work lost their jobs once again. The impact of the minimum wage stipulations, likewise, was not always positive. Mill owners throughout New England interpreted the minimum of thirteen dollars per week for forty hours of work as the maximum they had to pay as well. Semi-skilled and skilled mill hands throughout the region, therefore, saw their incomes decline significantly.35

So too did the Cotton Textile Code have negative effects for southern operatives, as individual mill owners in the region devised practices of circumventing the rules established by it. In spite of the code’s hours stipulations, many southern mill managers

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34 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 298; Hodges, New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 56-57; Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 436.
35 Hodges, New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 57; Irons, Testing the New Deal, 64.
used the stretch-out to ensure that their output of goods would continue to be higher than mills in New England operating on the same schedules so that they would not lose their market share. Operatives throughout the Piedmont South found themselves doing the same amount of work, and sometimes more, in an eight-hour shift than in ten or eleven hour shifts before the code production curtailments began. “The Dwight Manufacturing Company of Alabama City, Alabama is going to the greatest possible extremes on the ‘Stretch-out’ system,” wrote Dwight operative H. S. Busy to NRA head Hugh Johnson. “This stretch out system in textile mill’s are killing people,” H. C. Bell echoed, “In 1929, I Run 10 looms Now I Run 50 looms.”

The Cotton Textile Code was supposed to be a means through which the industry would not only be revitalized but would also provide gainful employment for the thousands of mill hands who had been victims of the depression mill closures. In actuality, between August 1933 and August 1934, an additional 50,000 cotton textile workers nationwide lost their jobs.

Southern textile mill owners also found ways around paying the Cotton Textile Code’s twelve-dollar minimum wage. The most effective means of doing this was to

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36 H. S. Busy to Hugh Johnson, 1 August 1933, National Recovery Administration, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, E398, Records of the National Recovery Administration, RG9, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records. All spelling and punctuation in the cited passages are as they are in the original letters. As shown in detail by the authors of *Like a Family*, the writing of NRA-related letters by mill hands to New Deal bureaucrats, FDR, and Eleanor Roosevelt was a political act. See, Hall, et al., 293-294. For excerpts of similar letters written by textile mill workers in North and South Carolina in response to failures of the NRA, see Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 293-327; Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat*, 90-96.

37 Irons, *Testing the New Deal*, 65, 69. The Dwight Manufacturing Company, as was the case with mills throughout the country, sped-up its operations so that it could produce as many goods as possible before the Cotton Textile Code, which mill owners correctly assumed would drive production costs up, went into effect. In May 1933, the company hired an additional 650 operatives and began running on a twenty-four-hour, day-night basis. Dwight management restricted its operating hours to eighty as mandated by the code as of 17 July but also laid off these 650 workers. Dwight employees complained that many of those staying on the job were friends and family of the “bosses,” and that supervisors began increasing their workloads to keep production levels high. *Gadsden Times*, 11 May 1933; *Southern Textile Bulletin*, 18 May 1933; Lena Clayton to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 19 July 1933; H. S. Busy to Hugh Johnson, 1 August 1933; and Margaret Pearson to Hugh Johnson, 6 August 1933, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records.
reclassify the jobs that operatives held so that, according to the exemptions from the minimum wage provisions enumerated in sections two and three of the code, they could pay them less. Management began designating their operatives as “yard help,” listing white workers as “negro help,” and designating employees who had been working for the company for years as “helpers” or as “apprentices.” W. A. Pepper, an elevator operator in the cardroom of the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City mill, for example, earned $9.22 a week before the recovery plan began but, within a week of the code going into effect, management reclassified him as yard help. Even though Pepper held the same position in the card room, by reclassifying him, the company could pay Pepper $8.40 for forty hours of work instead of the twelve dollars he should have received under the code’s minimum wage provision. “I know of many others,” Pepper declared, “that they transferred that way to get out of paying the 12.00.” Georgia Thurman complained to code officials that the Dwight Company “is not paying code wages at all and nearly all the Hands even those that was raised in this mill are put on apprentice Pay Roll.” Thurman added that there were “Lots of other ways they are violating the code, Take a week to tell it all.”

One of the “lots of other ways” the management of the Dwight Manufacturing Company and textile mills throughout the country broke the Cotton Textile Code was by ignoring the protections afforded to workers who wanted to join a union. When Congress passed the NIRA in July 1933, thousands of textile workers, especially those employed in the mills of the Piedmont South, embraced the organizing possibilities of Section 7(a) and

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38 Affidavits and Sworn Statements, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records.
40 Georgia Thurman to L. R. Gilbert, Cotton Textile National Industrial Relations Board Secretary, 5 September 1933, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records.
its embodiment in Article VIII of the Cotton Textile Code. The national leadership of the UTWA was optimistic that the NIRA gave them the backing necessary to establish a robust national union with a substantial southern membership. Even in the absence of a structured southern organizing campaign, mill workers formed unions at their workplaces and flooded the UTWA with requests for local charters. UTWA affiliations skyrocketed as the union issued over 600 charters to new locals in twelve months, and membership jumped from an estimated 40,000 in September 1933 to more than 300,000 within a year. Over a decade after management at the Dwight Manufacturing Company's Alabama City mill successfully broke the textile union there, Dwight employees reestablished a UTWA local in July 1933. It was one of twenty-five textile unions chartered in Alabama by the summer of 1934. The belief that they had the power of the federal government behind them gave many Dwight employees, as was the case with textile workers throughout the region, the confidence to organize. Despite the staunch opposition they had received from employers in the past, they sought redress to their grievances over the conditions in which they lived and labored through collective action.42

41 New England textile historian William Hartford noted that "In New England, workers watched these activities approvingly." See Hartford, Where is Our Responsibility?, 60.

42 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 304; Hodges, New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 61; Irons, Testing the New Deal, 100. Janet Irons argued that an important component of southern union building under the Cotton Textile Code was the connection workers in different mills had with union organization between 1930 and 1932. She uses the mills of the Huntsville, Alabama area as an example of how the unions organized there between 1933 and 1934 were rooted in the strong union presence established in the area during the UTWA southern organizing campaign of 1930-1931. See Irons, Testing the New Deal, 69-70. It is important to note, however, that workers in southern mills where no unions had ever been established or, like at the Dwight Manufacturing Company in Alabama City, were broken during the 1920s and did not reconstitute during the 1930-1931 southern organizing drive, also joined unions in record numbers under the NRA code. This stands as evidence of the faith that mill hands had in the power of the federal government, working through the NRA, to fundamentally alter the anti-union status quo that prevailed in individual mills and throughout the industry.
“In the Gadsden territory [organizing] has been much harder on account of antagonistic influences and the work has been slower,” L. W. Parnell reported to the delegates of the Alabama State Federation of Labor in 1934, “We have however some good local unions in the textile and steel industries, and our growth in other unions have been gradual and consistent.” Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, Gadsden had been one of the toughest anti-union cities in the South. Residents of the community overwhelmingly supported the open shop movement initiated by Gadsden business groups in 1923. Hostility toward labor organizations also prevailed because of the virulent anti-union sentiments of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, the Gulf States Steel Company, and the Goodyear Rubber and Tire Company which, with nearly 7,000 employees combined, were the three largest employers in the area. According to historian Wayne Flynt, these three companies “Aided by a community eager to attract industry and keep out unions . . . made Gadsden a major battleground.” The owners of the Dwight Manufacturing Company contended that the existence of organized labor in its mills was unacceptable because of the limitations it could place on management’s prerogatives to run the mill as it pleased. The company railed against the prospect of

44 Wayne Flynt, Poor But Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 331. In 1932, the city of Gadsden annexed Alabama City because the depression had plunged Alabama City into such financial difficulties that it would not meet its debt obligations and also provide the services “necessary to the health, safety, protection and education of the people.” Although Alabama City ceased to be an independent entity, it took on the character of a city within a city. The Dwight Manufacturing Company continued to dominate the day-to-day management of the locale’s affairs and remained the owner of hundreds of residential properties within the mill village. Gadsden Times, 13 July 1932.
increasing wages and decreasing workloads, which would drive-up costs and hamper the company’s competitiveness in the marketplace, to meet a union’s demands.\footnote{For information on the attempts to organize unions at Goodyear and Gulf States Steel under Section 7(a), see Charles Martin, “Southern Labor Relations in Transition: Gadsden, Alabama, 1930-1943,” \textit{Journal of Southern History} 47(November 1981): 548-549.}

Using the closed mills in Chicopee, Massachusetts, as evidence of what a union presence could do to undermine a company’s ability to remain profitable, Dwight’s owners vowed to keep its Alabama operations union-free and surreptitiously violated the collective bargaining provisions of the Cotton Textile Code. The attitude of a majority of southern textile mill owners mirrored that of the management at the Dwight Company and they paid no heed to the rights of workers to engage in union organizing. Dwight management employed union-busting tactics that had been successful in the past and refused to recognize any “third party” bargaining agent, fired the leaders and organizers of the Dwight UTWA local, hired non-union workers as their replacements, and evicted the terminated operatives from company housing. Employees began reporting Dwight’s intransigence toward the UTWA local in Alabama City to the administrators of the Cotton Textile Code almost immediately after the code went into effect. “I have at various times talked to other employees regarding the union and some of them gave me applications for membership in the union at Alabama City, Alabama,” noted Dwight employee Denton Taylor in September 1933, “my foreman told me they could not use me any longer. After they laid me off they put a boy in my place and gave him my job. This boy . . . did not belong to the union.”\footnote{Sworn Statement by Denton Taylor to Thomas Callan, Notary Public, Gadsden, AL, 15 September 1933, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records.} A month later, A. A. Sewall, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alabama City UTWA local, reported that a request the local made to the Dwight Company’s management to meet “and try to settle some of the grievances” of the union’s
members was refused by the mill superintendent who said “they was not going to have any thing to do with it.”

Three weeks after the union’s request for a meeting was rebuffed, Dwight operative Emory Smith received treatment from management similar to that documented by organizer Denton Taylor. “About ten days before I was laid off I was elected vice president of our local Union,” he stated, “On Saturday afternoon after my election I gave a short talk or address on the Square in Alabama City, in favor of the Union.”

Because it wanted to create a perception of compliance with the Cotton Textile Code’s provisions, however, the Dwight Company could not simply fire every member of the Alabama City UTWA local. Dwight management, therefore, took steps to make it appear that the firings of union workers happened not because of their UTWA membership but because of workplace incompetence. A twenty-year employee of the Dwight Company told of how her boss “had my work checked for two days” and “after finding a mistake he layed me off for good,” presumably because a mill manager saw her marching in Gadsden’s Labor Day parade. Dwight mill overseers also used intimidation tactics to keep workers from joining the union and to get those who were already members to renounce their association with the local. After eleven years of working for the Dwight Manufacturing Company “without trouble or complaint about my work,” Will McCain joined the Alabama City union, and when asked by his overseer, S. L. Long, if had become a union member, McCain responded that “it was no more than

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47 A. A. Sewall, UTWA Local 1878 Secretary-Treasurer to L. R. Gilbert, National Cotton Textile Industrial Committee Secretary, 28 October 1933, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records.
48 Sworn Statement by Emory Smith to Ann Clark, Notary Public, Gadsden, AL, 20 November 1933, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records.
49 Sworn Statement by Susie Reed to Ann Clark, Notary Public, Gadsden, AL, 20 November 1933, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records.
my right, an no more than many others had done and would do.” Long told McCain in return that McCain “knew what it meant to join.” Though not officially fired, McCain was laid off by Long the next day. A month later, J. W. Carter was fired for careless on the job by his supervisor Walter Enterkin who thought that the union was “nothing but peacebreakers.” Carter noted that he later received word from another mill hand that if he “would stay away from those Union meetings Walter . . . would give me a better job.”

The Dwight mill hands and their counterparts throughout the country lodged their complaints with various NRA officials, assuming that their written protests would be taken seriously and that the abuses of the code that they labored under daily would be corrected. What these men and women encountered, however, was a bureaucracy dominated by the mill men who wrote the Cotton Textile Code and oversaw its administration, men completely unsympathetic to the workers’ grievances and who ignored even the most blatant violations of the code’s provisions. Textile workers’ letters and sworn statements cataloging the ways their employers and immediate supervisors broke the Cotton Textile Code traveled through a maze of local, state, and district committees before reaching the Cotton Textile National Industrial Relations Board, also referred to as the Bruere Board, which had been established to investigate code violations and to oversee and appoint state oversight committees. Mill operatives usually received form letters that included a copy of the articles of the Cotton Textile Code applicable to

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50 Sworn Statement by William McCain to Thomas Callan, Notary Public, Gadsden, AL, 16 September 1933; and Sworn Statement by J. W. Carter to Ann Clark, Notary Public, Gadsden, AL, 21 November 1933, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records. For examples of code violations in North and South Carolina mills, see Hall, et al., Like a Family, 293-307.
the complaint and told that "if, after reading the enclosed . . . you are in doubt as to procedure, the committee would be glad to have you write again."51

Members of the Cotton Textile Code bureaucracy, moreover, usually took the word of mill managers at face value, despite overwhelming evidence of what came to be known as "code chiseling." Responding to letters and affidavits from employees of the Dwight Manufacturing Company that overseers fired workers because of their union membership, for example, code complaint investigator E. O. Fitzsimmons stated, "The management assured me that they had not discriminated against the union or its members in any way, and that they were familiar with the provisions of article VIII of the Code and were living up to it."52 Between 8 August 1933 and 8 August 1934, the Bruere Board received 3,920 complaints, but authorized only ninety-six investigations and resolved one dispute over wages and hours in an operative's favor.53 In the rare instances where workers' complaints were determined to be true, "The correct interpretation [of the Cotton Textile Code articles] was explained to the management" and the matter was usually settled after assurances "that future application would be made . . . in accordance with the code."54

51 The board took its name from its chairman, Robert Bruere. The Bruere Board determined whether or not complaints warranted further investigation. For detailed information on the Cotton Textile Code bureaucracy, see Hodges, New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 64-70; Irons, Testing the New Deal, 79-84; Hall, et al., Like a Family, 307-308.
52 Report Regarding Complaint Against Dwight Manufacturing Company, Filed 28 October 1933, Investigated by E. O. Fitzsimmons, 11 January 1934, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records. Sworn statements made by overseers from the Dwight Company denying that they had ever "discharged or caused to be discharged any employee" because of union affiliation are also located in the Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder of the NRA Records.
53 Hall, et al., Like a Family, 325.
54 See, for example, Reports Regarding Complaint Against Dwight Manufacturing Company, Investigated by E. O. Fitzsimmons, 20 October 1933, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records. James Hodges noted that investigations done under the direction of the Bruere Board were short in duration, virtually ignored the issue of discrimination against union members, and reported "almost no stretch out, only misunderstandings of new scientific work assignments or substandard workers being dismissed." Hodges, New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 70-72.
The bureaucratic nightmare set up to administer the Cotton Textile Code and the ongoing degradations experienced by the workers not only at the Dwight Manufacturing Company but in mills throughout the Piedmont South, engendered deep feelings of resentment against their employers. "There is more dissatisfaction among labor now than I have ever seen," vented Dwight boilerman W. L. Hilton in a letter to Hugh Johnson, "If the administration isn't going to see that Industry and Business live to these Code an N.R.A. why they might as well throw up hands and quit for Employers in the South are sure as-not going to do until they are forced to it."55 This sense of aggravation was only compounded by a disconnect that existed between the rank-and-file and the national leadership of the UTWA. While organizers continued to establish UTWA locals in previously unorganized mills throughout the country, UTWA President Thomas McMahon appeared to the rank-and-file as unconcerned with addressing their immediate needs. McMahon urged cooperating with and working to settle grievances through the administrative bureaucracy of the Cotton Textile Code. As early as the fall of 1933, sporadic strikes occurred in individual mills in the Piedmont South and the UTWA national leadership began receiving requests from locals throughout the country that they be allowed to strike. McMahon, nevertheless, hoping to prevent a rift between the Roosevelt administration and the union, maintained that the best approach to the situation of code chiseling was to allow him to continue to try to use the union's influence to extract concessions and secure better enforcement of the code's provisions through the machinery set up by the Cotton Textile National Industrial Relations Board. Protests lodged by McMahon to Bruere Board officials over abuses of the code's wage

55 W. L. Hilton to Hugh Johnson, 23 September 1933, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records.
exemptions, continued use of the stretch-out, and discrimination against union workers, however, were ignored as readily as those from the mill hands themselves.\textsuperscript{56}

Discontent at the grassroots level reached a boiling point in the spring of 1934 when Hugh Johnson approved the Cotton Textile Code Authority’s request for another round of production cuts which would again reduce the maximum hours a mill could run per week from eighty to sixty for up to ninety days. As was the case with the changes in operating hours made in November 1933, the hourly wage rate for workers remained the same but their weekly shift dropped from forty to thirty hours. This meant that the code’s minimum wage of twelve dollars per week became nine dollars per week, and that earnings would be even lower for mill hands who had been reclassified by management or who worked in mills that chose not to operate on a full schedule.\textsuperscript{57} On May 28, UTWA Vice-President Francis Gorman, responding to the disgruntlement rampant in mills throughout the country, threatened a general strike to begin on Monday, 4 June if the reductions went into effect as scheduled. The UTWA local at the Dwight Manufacturing Company prepared to participate in the threatened walkout but James Holland, President of the local, noted that he hoped “that a satisfactory settlement could be reached.”\textsuperscript{58} The mounting tensions were momentarily diffused, however, when Hugh Johnson negotiated an agreement between UTWA President Thomas McMahon, CTNIRB Chairman Robert Bruere, and Code Authority Chairman George Sloan. Under the terms of the settlement, the UTWA would not go forward with the general strike, the


\textsuperscript{57} The Dwight Company, for example, announced a planned shutdown for one full week in July and for another full week in August to make needed repairs to the mill and machinery. The announcement of the scheduled closures appeared in the Gadsden Times, 6 June 1934.

\textsuperscript{58} Gadsden Times, 2 June 1934.
Bruere Board would add a representative of the union, and an investigation would be done to see if the production cuts were really necessary and to determine the feasibility of raising wages. The curtailment went forward on 1 June and the UTWA remained, at best, a junior partner in the administration of the Cotton Textile Code, and at worst, a supplicant to the mill owners who dominated it.59

Thomas McMahon’s settlement with Johnson, Bruere, and Sloan did nothing to alleviate the distress of mill hands throughout the country. On top of the twenty-five percent weekly wage reduction caused by the production cut, the stretch-out, job reclassifications, and layoffs of and discrimination against union members continued. The UTWA rank-and-file, therefore, took matters into their own hands. During the spring and summer of 1934, textile workers in mills throughout the Piedmont South engaged in unauthorized strikes against recalcitrant owners and management. In Alabama, union members in several mills, including the Dwight Manufacturing Company, went on strike during the first week of July. Within days of the walkouts, all of Alabama’s UTWA locals met to discuss whether or not to declare a statewide general strike and to take a strike vote. In spite of Thomas McMahon’s advice, forty of the forty-two locals voted in favor of the statewide walkout, demanding payment of the twelve dollar minimum wage for a thirty-hour week, abolition of the stretchout, the reemployment of workers who had lost jobs because of union affiliations, and recognition of the UTWA as the chosen bargaining agent for the workers. A week later, as many as

23,000 mill hands in over thirty mills in the textile district of northern Alabama were on strike.\(^6\)

The immediate cause of the 1934 walkout at the Dwight Manufacturing Company was the firing of union members. “Fifteen hundred employees of the Dwight Cotton Mills here walked out on strike this morning,” the local press reported, “James Holland, president of the local, said that the employees [sic] were discharged yesterday because they voted last week to join in the general textile strike in Alabama.” Protesting not only the firings of five unionists but also the accumulated grievances of the stretch-out, union discrimination, job reclassifications, wage cuts, and being ignored by Thomas McMahon as well as by the members of the Cotton Textile Code bureaucracy, the union vowed to stay out of the mill until all its demands were met. Dwight Agent Allan Little denied all charges of discrimination and code breaking made by the union, contending that the Dwight local had not presented him directly with any formal list of complaints. “We are operating under the code of the National Recovery Act,” Little stated, “and expect to continue to do so.”\(^6\)

The striking Dwight workers immediately began picketing at all entrances to the mill, “preventing any shipment of goods or freight of any sort... to enter the yards” and were “active in seeing that nobody goes into the plant.” Agent Little announced his intention of not bargaining in any way with the union by posting a sign at

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\(^{61}\) *Gadsden Times*, 12 July 1934; P. O. Davis, Alabama Cotton Textile Industrial Relations Board Chairman to Robert Bruere, Cotton Textile National Industrial Relations Board Chairman, 14 July 1934; and Robert Bruere to Thomas McMahon, UTWA President, 14 July 1934, Dwight Manufacturing Company Folder, NRA Records.
the mill gates stating, "this mill will be closed indefinitely." And, in classic Dwight Company form, Little responded to the workers' action with a lockout.62

The walkout of Alabama's textile workers and threats made by North Carolina's UTWA locals that they would begin a statewide strike of their own, forced the national leadership of the UTWA to take a more aggressive stance against the Cotton Textile Code Authority. UTWA President Thomas McMahon announced that the union's national convention, originally scheduled to take place in late September, would be moved to August so that the issues of the Alabama strike and the possibility of calling a nationwide general strike could be discussed. McMahon, while assuming a more militant tone, was also very careful to distance himself from the mill hands already on strike in Alabama whose actions were characterized by Scott Roberts, President of the Alabama Cotton Textile Association, as a "strike against the NRA."63 McMahon walked a fine line between placating restless southern mill hands and not undermining the union's tenuous position within the Cotton Textile Code bureaucracy. McMahon publicly stated that the Alabama operatives were showing "an utter disregard for the principles of the NRA," but that unless employers "show some inclination to cooperate with labor" the "United Textile Workers special convention . . . will vote in favor of the strike."64

At the August special convention of the UTWA, southern unionists articulated their grievances over the stretch-out, miserable working conditions, and the flouting of the Cotton Textile Code by mill owners throughout the region to the over 500 delegates present. James Holland, President of the Dwight UTWA local, argued that if wages were

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62 Gadsden Times, 14 July 1934.
63 Ibid., 18 July 1934.
not raised “thousands of textile workers would be starved to death,” noting that “whole families had been discharged from mills for no other reason than that they belonged to the union.” A. W. Cox of Huntsville, Alabama told of how he had been “shot at and blackjacked by employers’ henchmen” because of his affiliation with the UTWA.65 Unionists from mills in the Northeast agreed to act in support of their southern counterparts and, after the introduction of over fifty resolutions calling for a general strike, the UTWA passed a general strike motion, authorized for all branches of the industry, with only ten dissenting votes. The UTWA convention delegates issued the same set of demands made in July by the Alabama locals and named Vice-President Francis Gorman as director of the strike which was set to begin on 1 September.66

On Monday, 3 September, UTWA members initiated strikes in textile mills throughout the South. Support for the general strike gained momentum over the next several days, with unionists in the textile centers of the Northeast commencing walkouts on 4 September, protesting, in the first display of nationwide solidarity of its kind in the UTWA’s history, not only their grievances but also walking out in support of those in the South whose plight was measurably worse.67 Over the next three weeks, “flying squadrons” of UTWA members traveled in cars and trucks to help start strikes in unorganized, isolated textile manufactories throughout the Piedmont South, and textile operatives went on strike in every major textile town throughout New England. At its peak, the general strike involved as many as 400,000 mill hands nationwide. Reaction to

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65 Gadsden Times, 16 August 1934.
67 3 September was Labor Day but it was not a recognized holiday in southern mills. As Labor Day was recognized in the mills throughout the Northeast, walkouts did not start there until the following day.
the strike varied from location to location and ranged from peaceful to violent. Many mill managers, like Agent Allan Little at the Dwight Manufacturing Company, simply closed their facilities to wait out the strikers. Other manufacturers, in response to the flying squadrons and tensions between union and non-union workers hired to replace them, employed armed guards and were permitted by southern governors to use the National Guard to protect mill properties, prevent additional walkouts from happening, and to safeguard strikebreakers who crossed the picket lines. Four New England governors also called up the National Guard and in numerous northern and southern locales, violent clashes occurred between strikers, scabs, local sheriffs, guardsmen, and private police forces.68

In textile mills throughout the country, however, production continued for the duration of the strike. In Alabama, only thirty-one mills out of eighty-three, employing only about one-third of the operatives in the state, participated in the strike. Management control remained tight in the non-striking towns, and only one Alabama mill joined the walkout after the UTWA approved the national strike.69 With the UTWA unable to completely shutdown the industry nationwide and critically short of funds, the strike

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began to fail within three weeks of its start. Not wanting to sour his relationship with Roosevelt administration officials and feeling that, given the economic conditions that prevailed throughout the country, the strike was ill timed, William Green rejected the UTWA’s request for AFL funds to be used for the general strike even before it had commenced. Without the AFL’s financial backing, the UTWA quickly realized that it was unable on its own to raise the money and furnish relief supplies needed to sustain the hundreds of thousands of mill hands on strike. Operatives throughout the industry, especially those in Alabama who had been out of work for over six weeks, were, according to UTWA spokesmen, being driven back to work by “force and hunger.” Public opinion, likewise, did not favor the strikers. Pronouncements by the Cotton Textile Code Authority and individual manufacturers continued to characterize the strike as one that was a violation of the agreement made between the UTWA and NRA officials and that it was not a protest against unyielding, union-hostile employers but against the law established under the NRA.70

With the likelihood of mill managers accepting the demands of the UTWA diminishing with each passing day, Francis Gorman worked behind the scenes to secure a quick settlement of the conflict. Within days of the start of the strike, President Roosevelt appointed a special board to investigate the causes of the walkout, naming John Winant, a former governor of New Hampshire, to chair the inquiry. The Winant Board, as it came to be called, issued its report on 21 September. The Winant Report’s recommendations called for the abolishment of the Bruere Board, the creation of a new board to hear workers’ grievances, and for inquiries into the matters of the stretch-out and

the possibility of raising wages. The board’s members suggested that President Roosevelt ask workers to end the strike based on their proposals, and to call on mill owners to resume operations without discrimination. When Roosevelt made this request, Gorman had the out he had been looking for and, declaring the strike a success, the UTWA officially called off the walkout on 22 September.\textsuperscript{71} Gorman announced, “We have now gained every substantial thing that we can gain in this strike. Our strike has torn apart the whole unjust structure of the NRA, lifting a load from all labor as well as from ourselves.”\textsuperscript{72}

But in reality, the UTWA had suffered a terrible defeat. Textile mill owners were not in any way compelled to honor the recommendations of the Winant Board and blatantly ignored FDR’s request that they refrain from taking punitive measures against the strikers. Nowhere was this loss more palpable than at the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City mill. After Gorman announced the official end of the conflict, the leaders of the Dwight local voted to continue their strike, insisting that “the employers first guarantee unconditionally, the reinstatement, without discrimination of all who quit the mills.” In response, Dwight management announced that the mill would reopen. On the following day, however, it took aggressive steps to break the union.\textsuperscript{73}

When looking at the 1934 General Textile Strike—the largest and one of the most geographically dispersed walkouts in the history of American labor—from a local perspective, it resembled strikes that had occurred before. The path the conflict took at

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{71} Hodges, \textit{New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry}, 112-116; Irons, \textit{Testing the New Deal}, 152-153. UTWA historian Robert Brooks argued that if Gorman would have waited to end the strike it would have become “a disorganized rout,” and by calling it off when he did, the union was at least able to send workers back to the mills “in a well disciplined retreat.” See Brooks, “The United Textile Workers of America,” 389-390.
\item \textsuperscript{72} \textit{Gadsden Times}, 22 September 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid.}, 23 September 1934.
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the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s Alabama City mill paralleled the strikes that happened there in 1921 and 1922, as well as strikes that occurred in Dwight’s Chicopee mill starting in the 1870s. After the workers struck, Dwight management simply closed the mill and instituted a lockout, threatening the workers with the possibility of being fired and evicted from their homes, until the majority of the strikers yielded to management. New, non-union employees replaced those who did not abandon the union.

The 1934 Dwight strike officially collapsed on 24 September when the company secured injunctions against sixty strikers, “enjoining them from interfering in any way with the operation” of the mill. The local sheriff served only twenty-four of the injunctions that went to the officials of the UTWA local, their family members, and close associates. Agent Allan Little assumed that making an example of the strike leaders and threatening others with legal action would be enough to destroy the local, and stated that the other thirty-six named in the injunction would not be formally served unless they caused “further interference with the operation of the mills.” In all, Dwight management fired 115 of the strikers who refused to renounce their membership in the union. The UTWA filed charges of discrimination and harassment with the Cotton Textile National Labor Relations Board but to no avail. Dwight management used the prevailing economic conditions to its benefit, as it easily found eager, non-union

74 The injunctions served to the Dwight workers threatened legal action against those who “in any way or manner whatsoever by use of threats of personal injury, intimidation, suggestion of danger, or threats of violence of any kind, interfering with, hindering any person engaged in the employ or willing to accept any employment of complainant in connection with its business in manufacturing cotton goods for interstate or intrastate commerce, or from inducing or attempting to compel or induce by threats, intimidation, force, violence, or putting in fear or suggestion of danger any of the employees [sic] of the complainant of persons seeking employment with it so as to cause them to refuse to perform their duties.” Gadsden Times, 24 September 1934; Flynt, Poor But Proud, 331. Bryant Simon emphasized the importance of southern poverty as a factor in undermining the possibility of successful strikes and the establishment of a union base in southern textiles during the Great Depression. See Simon, “Rethinking Why There Are So Few Unions in the South” Georgia Historical Quarterly 81 (Summer 1997): 478-481.
replacements for ousted workers from the pool of surplus labor made up of unemployed industrial workers and small farmers in the immediate Gadsden area. The company was able to secure a workforce to reopen its mills without the operatives who remained loyal to the UTWA local. When the Dwight Company began production again, "Observers . . . said that the sight of those working people streaming along Kyle Avenue and other main thoroughfares to the mill gates was as welcome as almost anything could be right now . . . because of the spirit that seemed to dominate them." According to the local press, "They simply stepped back into normal habits as if nothing had ever happened."\footnote{Gadsden Times, 26 September 1934.}

The aftermath of the general strike in textile towns throughout the country, in varying degrees of severity, mirrored what happened in Alabama City. Northern and southern manufacturers called for a greater "solidarity of purpose on the part of cotton manufacturers" to prevent another strike from happening. Members of the National Association of Cotton Manufacturers created a "Platform of Principles of Industrial Relations," in which mill owners agreed that they would take all necessary steps to see that "the duty of management to conduct business for which it is responsible" would not be "obstructed by forcing a surrender of its proper functions to the government or to employee organizations." David Clark, likewise, urged readers of the \textit{Southern Textile Bulletin} to "entirely ignore the so-called 'impartial investigators' of the National Textile Labor Relations Board," reminding them that, "the only penalty for the application of boots to the seat of pants is through a local indictment and possibly a small fine."\footnote{NACM \textit{Transactions}, Annual Meeting, 1934, 101, 115; \textit{Southern Textile Bulletin}, 11 October 1934.}

Working conditions continued to erode as old patterns of code evasions resurfaced. As of January 1935, the Textile Labor Relations Board that had been established in the wake of
the strike to hear and settle code disputes, had received from strikers more than 1,600
discrimination complaints against 579 mills. Thomas McMahon, over a year later,
lamented that “thousands are still unemployed” because of the 1934 strike.77 By April
1937, the UTWA’s nationwide membership had dwindled to fewer than 38,000, with
only about 5,500 paid-up members in Alabama, Georgia, and North and South Carolina.78
Mill owners’ retaliations against workers who participated in the strike, their open
hostility toward taking any action on the Winant Board proposals, and their flouting of
the Cotton Textile Code’s stipulations protecting workers’ rights to organize, made the
end of the strike a bitter pill to swallow for mill hands who had trusted both their union
and the federal government to see that the conflict ended in their favor.79

Attempts to organize southern textile mills, however, did not completely end with
the 1934 strike debacle or with the Supreme Court’s ruling in May 1935 that the NIRA,
including Section 7(a), was unconstitutional. Between 1935 and 1939 textile unionists
began abandoning the largely defunct AFL-affiliated UTWA for membership within the
Congress of Industrial Organizations’ Textile Workers Union of America. In 1936,
textile unionists organized the Textile Workers’ Organizing Committee and developed
plans for a CIO-led southern organizing campaign. The passage of the Wagner Act in
1935 that established the National Labor Relations Board, a permanent agency intended
to prevent employers from engaging in unfair labor practices and discrimination against
bargaining units chosen by employees to represent them, bolstered the TWOC’s

77 Hodges, New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 124; United Textile
Workers of America, Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Annual Convention, 1936, 8.
78 The UTWA membership was 37,588 nationwide, and 5,472 in the leading southern textile
79 Ibid., 122-125; Irons, Testing the New Deal, 154-158; Daniel, Culture of Misfortune, 52-53;
Hall, et al., Like a Family, 350-353; Flamming, Creating the Modern South, 203-208.
optimism. Textile unionists hoped that they could capitalize on the momentum created by the CIO’s successes in organizing mass industries like steel, autos, rubber, and electrical goods, and finally make headway in the South’s largest and most union-hostile industry.⁸⁰

The TWOC organizing drive, which began in April 1937, unlike UTWA campaigns of the past, had ample financial resources for its endeavor supplied from other CIO-affiliated unions nationwide. Still, by 1938, the campaign was struggling to overcome the challenges presented by wage reductions, layoffs, production cuts, and mill closures that occurred during the Roosevelt Recession. The TWOC, moreover, faced the opposition of mill owners, the hesitancy of many southern operatives to join another union until it had proved to them it was strong enough to force management to bargain with it, and the complexities of organizing a highly decentralized industry. TWOC organizing efforts in northern mills brought significant successes as mill owners grudgingly accepted the establishment of collective bargaining under the provisions of the Wagner Act. The result was the unionization of nearly all of the textile manufactories there. Southern mill owners, however, openly defied the law and fought the TWOC tooth and nail. The TWOC’s 1937-1938 organizing campaign ended with the CIO being able to negotiate contracts in only nine mills, representing slightly more than 5,200 operatives in the Piedmont South.

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Southern membership in the TWUA grew marginally during World War II, but the center of textile unionism remained firmly entrenched in New England. By the end of the war, only 80,000 of the TWUA’s estimated 200,000 members worked in mills south of the Mason-Dixon Line. The CIO’s post-war southern organizing drive, dubbed “Operation Dixie,” also failed to establish a significant union presence in the region’s textile mills. The TWUA lost nearly sixty percent of the NLRB elections called during Operation Dixie, and by 1952 acted as bargaining agent in only two percent of the region’s mills. The failure of the CIO to make inroads not only in textiles but also in the majority of southern industries, meant that during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the South became for manufacturers throughout the Northeast what it had long been for New England textile mill owners: a low-wage, non-union haven for runaway producers.

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CHAPTER VII

"ECONOMIC LAW WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE ITS WAY:" THE DEMISE OF THE DWIGHT MANUFACTURING COMPANY AND LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Since Reconstruction, the industrial economy of the South had been based on low wage, low skill labor. By the 1920s, the regional wage differential between North and South and the absence of unionized labor had become a selling point not only for New England textile manufacturers but also for entrepreneurs undertaking a wide array of industrial pursuits. "The pushing of textile production in the South while New England mills get wage cuts and slack time is a conspicuous bit of current history," UTWA President Thomas McMahon observed in 1928, "...sawmill and planning mill products, furniture factories, railroad car repair shops, the building of automobile bodies, the making of stoves and cast-iron pipe and other iron work, and the manufacture of men's clothing has also contributed to the increase ... in the factory workers of the low-wage states."¹ In industries, like textiles, where labor constituted the majority of production costs, the savings a company could realize by the South's lower wage rates and taxes, and from industry-friendly state and local governments offering subsidies by way of land grants and low-cost loans, often made the difference between profits and losses. As more and more mass industries in the North and West organized during the 1930s and 1940s, ensuring that the South would remain a haven for companies seeking to escape high production costs elsewhere became a modus operandi for state and local government

¹ Textile Worker, January 1928.
officials and communities throughout the region. The link tying southern prosperity to a union-free environment that had been part of the New South's mantra since the 1880s, only strengthened after World War II.2

Effective unionization and an equalization of standards throughout the U.S. textile industry that organization could have helped to bring about, therefore, eluded New England operatives and mill owners alike who, through the late 1950s and 1960s, were trying to save the region's cotton manufacturing industry from total collapse.3 The minimum wage and forty-hour workweek standards passed as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938 lessened the gap between production costs that existed between mills in the North and South, but did not do away with it completely.4 Forty-four percent of southern textile operatives saw their wages rise as a result of FLSA minimum wage provisions in the fall of 1939, but only six percent of northern mill hands were affected. The regional allowances built into the FLSA and the success of the Textile Workers Union of America in negotiating contracts, which included higher wages and benefits that ultimately drove up costs further in many New England mills but not southern ones, meant that the regional disparities would continue. At the end of World War II, the wage differential between northern and southern mills hovered around fifteen percent, the same


3 Tom Juravich, William Hartford, and James Green noted that only "a handful" of textile manufacturers were "genuinely committed to doing business in New England" and cooperated with TWUA strategies to save the industry in the region. See Juravich, Hartford, and Green, Commonwealth of Toil: Chapters in the History of Massachusetts Workers and Their Unions (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 128.

4 David Koistinen discussed several attempts made in the 1930s to equalize North-South textile industry standards through federal legislation before the passage of the FLSA in 1938. See Koistinen, "Dealing With Deindustrialization: Economics, Politics, and Policy During the Decline of the New England Textile Industry, 1920-1960" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1999), 159-165, 172-180.
degree of difference that existed in 1907. Between 1947 and 1954, the incomes of all southern industrial workers remained twenty to twenty-five percent below the national average.5

The capital flight and mill closures that had become standard in the New England textile industry by the end of the 1920s accelerated through the 1950s and 1960s. Suffering from the ill effects of outdated production facilities and from both southern and international competition, by 1970, nearly 300,000 textile industry jobs in the region had been lost due to bankruptcies or relocation to the South. What happened in Chicopee, Massachusetts with the closure of the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s mills there in 1927, became the norm in textile mill towns throughout the region over the next four decades. Displaced workers struggled to obtain work and when they did, their standard of living was often lowered as the new positions they found were often in unorganized light industries, or were in the service sector where pay scales were lower than in the unionized mills.6


Just as the Dwight Manufacturing Company's construction of a southern branch mill during the depression of 1893 and its decision to completely shut down its Massachusetts operations in 1927 foreshadowed mill relocations and closures that would become normative throughout New England, events at the Dwight Manufacturing Company's Alabama City mill between 1935 and 1959 also pointed toward wider trends that would exist in the southern textile industry by the 1970s. Throughout the late 1930s, the Dwight Company vigorously fought attempts made by former members of the Dwight UTWA local and the TWUA to organize an independent union in the Alabama City mill. After the resumption of operations in the wake of the 1934 strike, management urged the formation of a company union, the Dwight Employees Association. The company hoped the DEA would be an effective means through which they could mitigate the possibility a resurrected independent union local among those employees who still had pro-union leanings by giving these workers an institutional outlet for their grievances, but through one which the company could directly control. In 1935, former Dwight UTWA unionists filed a complaint with the NLRB that the Dwight Employees Association was dominated by the company and was not a legitimate bargaining unit for the Alabama City employees because all of the DEA members who "negotiated" with management on behalf of the association's rank-and-file were mill supervisors. In March 1936, after concurring that the Dwight Employees Association was a tool of management, the NLRB ordered that the company hold a collective bargaining election. But, Dwight

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7 Janet Irons quoted a former member of the Dwight UTWA local as saying, "Well, everybody, you see, they dropped that union, they left that union, on account of they thought they got bit . . . . They were still union in the heart. They still wanted the union because they were being pressured so hard, like I told you, by the bosses, about, you do this, or you do that, or I'll get your job, 'til they wanted a union." See Irons, *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 162.
management refused to obey the order and stonewalled NLRB investigators for years. An NLRB election would not take place at the Dwight Manufacturing Company until 1943 when, after a nearly year long TWUA organizing campaign there and bowing to pressure from the War Labor Board so that the company could avoid a costly strike during wartime, management capitulated. Dwight employees chose the TWUA as their union of choice in September 1943.9

The TWUA acted as bargaining agent for the workers of the Dwight Manufacturing Company into the 1950s. In 1951, the Dwight Company merged with Cone Mills, Inc. of Greensboro, North Carolina as the only unionized mill of the twenty-one owned by Cone. The merger changed little in Dwight’s day-to-day operations. By 1958 the Alabama City mill contained over 100,000 spindles and the employees there produced an estimated twenty percent of the textile goods made by the entire Cone organization.10 The status quo at the Dwight mill was radically altered, however, when Dwight’s TWUA contract expired in 1959. Cone management, looking to cut costs in the face of increasingly tight foreign competition, used the contract negotiations as an opening wedge to rid themselves of the Dwight union and the wages, benefits, and workload standards it was able to negotiate for its members. “Even if the committee and

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8 In a 1937 article published in *The Nation*, Maxwell Stewart noted that “Gadsden may lay claim as being the toughest [anti-union] city in the United States. Other cities have had riots, occasional shootings, and periodic vigilante activity. But the reign of terror which has been maintained in the employers’ interest in this small Southern town has not been spontaneous or sporadic. It has been well organized, coolly carried out, and incomparably efficient—so effective, according to local newspapermen, that it probably cannot be overcome.” Maxwell Stewart, *The Nation*, 17 July 1937, 69, quoted in Hoffman, “A Study of the United Textile Workers of America in a Cotton Mill in a Medium-Sized Southern Industrial City: Labor Revolt in Alabama, 1934” (Ed.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1986), 3, fn. 3.


10 Gadsden Times, 30 May 1958.
Aerial view of the Dwight Manufacturing Company mill complex in Gadsden, Alabama at the time of the merger with Cone Mills, Inc. of Greensboro, North Carolina in 1951. (Courtesy Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden, Alabama).

the terms of our proposed new contract, this in itself is no guarantee that the future of the Dwight plant is assured,” warned Caesar Cone in a thinly veiled threat, published in the local press, that if the union did not yield to management, the mill would be closed. “The company is going to have a difficult time getting Dwight costs in line with its competition,” Cone added, “... We are battling to keep this house in good order, rather than have it tumble.”

Refusing to accept the company’s proposal of a nine cent per hour decrease in the minimum wage paid to Dwight workers, TWUA local 576 began a strike on 17 March 1959, seeking to force management to agree to a better contract. Cone management, as

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11 Gadsden Times, 6 March 1959.
Dwight’s management had done before in its 1920s union-busting attempts in Alabama City and Chicopee, simply shifted production from the Dwight facility to its other, non-union mills. The Dwight mill hands suffered from the fact that the TWUA had only been able to make inroads in a handful of the southern mills in the highly decentralized textile industry. In large multi-unit organizations like Cone, the union could not affect simultaneous work stoppages in all of the company’s mills that would likely have forced management to negotiate with it.

Three weeks into the strike, with the TWUA local showing no signs of weakness, Cone Mills, Inc. announced the permanent closure of the Dwight mill. “The industrial base of this city was shaken today,” the local press bemoaned, “The Dwight plant would be the second textile mill to close here in recent years. In 1954 the Sauquoit Mills closed its doors in the face of union demands.” The Dwight mill in Alabama City never reopened and 2,100 unionized mill operatives lost their jobs. “Etowah county was suddenly cut off from the influx of more than $7 million in payrolls annually,” one Gadsden resident recalled over fifteen years after the mill closure, “More than 10,000 persons were affected directly, people who were fed, clothed and sheltered with mill money.”

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12 *Gadsden Times*, 3, 17, 31 March and 10 April 1959. In a 1982 letter from Caesar Cone, former president of the Cone Mills, to James Hoffman, Cone noted, “I feel [the Dwight local] had an inflated value of its strength due to its neighboring locals at Republic [Steel] and Goodyear. Both these industries had industry-wide bargaining when strikes took place in Gadsden they were industry wide. And after a period of shut down the whole industry went back to work. But in textiles it was different.” See Hoffman, “A Study of the United Textile Workers of America in a Cotton Mill in a Medium-Sized Southern Industrial City,” 163-164.

13 *Gadsden Times*, 6 July 1975. Cone Mills began selling the company-owned houses in Dwight City to its employees in 1957, and when the mills closed in 1959, these operatives struggled to find employment in the area and to keep their homes. The company converted the Dwight facility into a warehouse that stored over 40,000 bales of cotton but it employed only twenty-five people. In September 1978 the Dwight warehouse was also closed, and the buildings were torn down between 1979 and 1980. The demolition of the old mill’s smokestack, the last of the plant to be torn down, occurred on 20
Concessionary bargaining with the TWUA, coupled with threats of mill closures, had dominated labor-management relations in the New England textile industry as early as the late 1940s, and became standard fare in the southern portion of the industry as well. The scenario played out at the Dwight mills during the 1950s was repeated in mill after mill throughout the region during the 1970s and 1980s. Southern mill owners found themselves facing the same effects of competition from lower-wage, non-union areas as their New England counterparts did before them. As noted by historian James Cobb, the South had become a high-wage region in comparison to many labor markets around the globe. The development of the textile industry internationally, especially in Southeast Asia, which began in the 1920s, meant that textiles made abroad undersold southern-made goods in the marketplace. This competition increased, and so too did its negative impact on the profits of textile mills located in the U.S. South.

During the 1970s and 1980s therefore, southern manufacturers began embracing strategies to maintain company profitability similar to those that the Dwight Manufacturing Company had used as early as the 1890s and that became normative throughout the New England industry during its years of decline from the 1920s through the 1960s. Global competition forced southern mill owners to make their operations more efficient and cost-effective. Management did this by extracting concessions from the small number of union locals that did exist in the region on matters of wages and workload standards, by lowering its labor costs through the installation of labor-saving machinery and completely automating numerous aspects of the production process, by specializing output, by lobbying for industry-friendly legislation, and by establishing


"This present, bitter contest over the north and south contains certain similarities to the controversies that brewed when New England in the earliest days of its textile development was feared as a competitor of the British Isles," observed AFL President William Green in 1929, "South America, China, India and Japan are stirring with industrial life that is entirely new to them . . . . Economic law will undoubtedly have its way . . . . Just as below the Mason Dixon line activity is going on that must be reckoned with so will those densely populated countries beyond the Pacific come into the arena."\footnote{\textit{Textile Worker}, February 1929.}

William Green was correct in his remarks, but in the end, the migration of textile mills from Massachusetts, and eventually the rest of New England, to the New South, was not the fault of unions, of state legislators who passed protective legislation, or of reform groups that influenced public policy. Instead, one must look for explanations in the nature of the cotton manufacturing industry itself. Indeed, the process of relocation in the cotton textile industry that occurred from region to region in the United States between the 1890s and the 1930s continues to happen from nation to nation within the context of economic globalization. Modern-day entrepreneurs, like many late nineteenth and early
twentieth-century Massachusetts textile mill owners, recognize that profits and, therefore, the likelihood of long-term company viability, are highest in underdeveloped, rural regions of the world where surplus labor is abundant, opportunities for gainful employment are few, and labor is cheap and unorganized. It is nearly impossible to halt the constant search for such areas by owners of industries. It is possible, nevertheless, to mitigate the potentially devastating impact of capital flight. But, in the words of William Green, it is first necessary “to recognize it in operation and to act upon it accordingly.” 16

There are lessons, therefore, that can be learned from the story of the Dwight Manufacturing Company’s move from Chicopee, Massachusetts to Alabama City, Alabama, and its part in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century migration of the New England textile industry to the South. The Dwight Company was always about thirty years ahead of the U.S. textile industry’s deindustrialization curve. It built its first southern branch plant in the 1890s when most New England mill owners waited until the 1920s, it completely liquidated its Massachusetts mills in the late 1920s when the majority of permanent regional closures did not occur until the 1950s and 1960s, and, like many southern mills that had been unionized but were unable to remain profitable in the face of international competition by the 1970s and 1980s, Cone management closed the Dwight mill in the late 1950s. The Dwight Manufacturing Company stands as one of the earliest examples of what happened in the New England textile industry, and eventually throughout the industrial Northeast in general during the rustbelt to sunbelt transitions of the late 1970s and 1980s. 17 Seeing the process of industrial relocation through the

16 Textile Worker, February 1929.
17 On the rustbelt to sunbelt transitions, see Cobb, Selling the South, 151-253; Bluestone and Harrison, The Deindustrialization of America; David Bensman and Roberta Lynch, Rusted Dreams: Hard Times in a Steel Community (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1987); Charles Craypo and Bruce...
specific lens of the Dwight Company, and the parts played by labor, management, and state governments in this process, provides a historic reference point for and helps inform on-going discussions about capital mobility, corporate responsibility, and the globalization of labor.

A fundamental problem for Massachusetts textile unionists between the 1880s and the 1920s was that they were unable to look past their craft orientation and become proactively involved in the process of change, related to technologies and skills, that was going on within the industry as southern textile production increased. Because of their local-state-regional outlook, moreover, there were significant moments of lost opportunity for these textile unionists in their quest to mitigate the impact of southern competition on the textile industry of Massachusetts. A fundamental turning point for Bay State textile unionists came between 1901 and 1902. When the southern-based National Union of Textile Workers and the northern, craft-focused American Federation of Textile Operatives officially amalgamated into the United Textile Workers of America in 1901, an organizational structure was in place for the first time through which a truly national textile union could have been established and managed. New England craft unions had the leaders and the treasuries that made the organization of not only southern operatives, but also the vast numbers of unorganized mill hands in the North, if not a sure thing, at least a distinct possibility. Textile industry historians have often pointed to the lack of funds as a fundamental problem hindering the ability of the UTWA to spearhead large organizational campaigns. But, union treasuries, although limited at the start, could have been augmented by the dues of newly organized workers, which would then have

created larger treasuries and the ability to provide ample strike funds for its locals and the potential for unionization drives in the future.

Southern operatives organized within the NUTW, for their part, embraced an industrial approach to unionizing that had the best potential for bridging the divides of skill, gender, and ethnicity pervasive throughout the textile industry. At the time of the 1901 NUTW-AFTO merger, the insular craft focus that northern mulespinners and loomfixers, the most well-endowed textile unions, embraced meant that their experience in organizing, operating, and funding a viable union would not be extended to the semi-skilled and unskilled operatives who constituted the largest portion of the textile workforce in the mills nationwide. Instead, their resources would be used to shore up existing unions and bargaining mechanisms that were locally entrenched. The inability and unwillingness to assume an industrial rather than craft organizational structure fundamentally undermined the UTWA's strength, capacity for long-term viability, and the union's ability to prevent the erosion of its New England membership base, especially during the 1920s and early 1930s. The craft unions that existed in textile centers like Chicopee, Fall River, Lowell, and New Bedford could establish standards of work that may have had an impact on non-union workers in their particular mills and locales, but the union-management bargaining that went on there had little bearing on the regulation of standards for the entire industry. Within the Dwight Manufacturing Company alone, the wages and workplace standards unionized workers at the Chicopee mill secured did not extend to the operatives in Alabama City.

The decade-long abandonment of UTWA attempts to unionize southern mills after the failed Augusta, Georgia strike in 1902, likewise, proved crucial, as the most
dynamic growth of the industry at the turn of the century occurred in the South. The UTWA lost the opportunity to establish a foothold there until World War I, when the conditions for New England’s decline were already in place. As the craft unions abandoned both their financial and moral support, for the organization of southern locals in the wake of the Augusta defeat, their local-regional perspective and the unionists’ conservatism became even more entrenched; so too did the disparity of conditions between the mills of Massachusetts and of those in the Piedmont South and the likelihood that future southern organizing campaigns would end in failure. Southern mill owners used their arsenal of union-busting techniques successfully time and again through the 1910s, 1920s, 1930s, and beyond. With each defeat, the challenge of establishing a union base in the region for the UTWA and later, for the TWUA, became increasingly difficult.

The absence of unions in the textile mills of the Piedmont South was an important factor in decisions made by mill owners, like those of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, to build branch plants there. “Southern competition” from these unorganized mills was real, but, in lieu of formulating corporate strategies that were responsible to shareholders and employees, New England mill owners all too often used it as an excuse, especially in the 1920s, to break unions, lower wages, increase workloads, and eventually, to abandon operations in the North altogether. When the UTWA finally began a concerted effort to organize southern mills in 1929, it was too little, too late. The reality for the UTWA in the late 1920s and through the 1934 general strike, as well as for the TWUA by the 1940s and 1950s, was that the unions found themselves trying to save a declining industry in one region by combating the low-wage, non-union conditions that were the foundation for industrial growth in the other. The time for a concerted effort
and firm commitment to organize the South was not when the most unionized portion of the industry had started its decline, but before.

New England textile unionists should have placed organizing southern workers at the top of their agenda from the very start of southern competition in the industry but did not. The failure of Massachusetts textile unionists to connect their conditions to those elsewhere also extended into the realm of legislation. These unionists facilitated the creation and passage of some of the best regulatory labor legislation in the United States by the turn-of-the-century, but the laws collectively would become an albatross in the ongoing battle for supremacy in the industry between textile mills in New England and those in the Piedmont South. “Imaginary state lines,” one textile manufacturer warned in 1904, “are not observed in industrial competition.” Just as textile unionists found in the 1920s that without a significant presence in the South, their ability to effectively bargain with management rested on a sandy foundation, they also realized that because southern workers remained unorganized, they had difficulty securing from the state the enactment of basic workplace regulations and could not force compliance with the limited state mandated ages, hours, and safety standards that were eventually established in the region. As regulatory legislation in New England became more stringent, so to did the effects of competition from southern mills where hours remained significantly longer, enforcement of child labor and education laws were lax, and where statehouses continued to be dominated by adherents to the region’s low-wage, laissez-faire, anti-union, pro-business industrial boosterism. By the time that federal legislation was enacted as part of the New Deal, the deindustrialization of New England’s textile industry was already well on its way, and it had little success staving off what had become the unavoidable.

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While Massachusetts textile unions were shortsighted with regard to the implications of southern competition, so too were the majority of Bay State mill owners. At the times when southern competition was its most severe, particularly during the depressions of 1893 and the 1920s, these New England industrialists spent their time complaining about the ill-effects of the low wages paid and the longer hours worked in southern mills and concentrated their energies on trying to equalize regional conditions by undoing state legislation and ridding their mills of unionized workers. Textile companies throughout New England spent thousands upon thousands of dollars to pay for statehouse lobbyists and to employ agents who secured non-union labor to replace striking workers. These strategies, time and again however, failed to achieve management's goals. It seems clear that cooperation with the unions in their mills and with pro-labor lobbyists and special interest groups in their efforts to secure better regulatory legislation outside of the region would have been a more prudent path to take. Massachusetts mill owners' resources would, perhaps, have been better utilized to fund union drives in the southern states and to pay for lobbyists working to secure higher standards there and at the federal level as the way to equalize the disparity of conditions that existed between northern and southern mills. The myopic focus on annual profits and complete corporate control over the production process meant that potential alternative solutions that might have corrected the conditions that would ultimately lead to the demise of the New England textile industry were largely ignored even as deindustrialization was already well on its way. By working for the lowest common dominator, capital flight to the South and fighting against the passage of regulatory legislation and the establishment of unions there became the strategy of choice for many
Massachusetts manufacturers, as it had for the owners of the Dwight Manufacturing Company, and made the region’s industrial decline more precipitous.

To be fair, however, in their efforts to build an effective organization and to secure regulatory legislation, textile unionists focused on the places where they would have the most success. The hostility of southern mill owners toward labor unions was a barrier to the establishment of a viable national organization that, for many unionists, seemed insurmountable. Individual preservation trumped the movement for inter-regional solidarity. Shoring up existing craft locals throughout New England and securing the passage of pro-labor laws at the state level appeared to textile unionists at the time and from their individual, local, and regional perspectives to be the most effective use of human, financial, and political resources. Few northern textile manufacturers, likewise, were willing or able to make the ideological leap necessary for them to have seen unionists as partners, to have aided in the organizing of their mills and of southern ones, and to have worked for the passage of regulatory legislation. It is only with the aid of hindsight that one is able to look back and point to moments and strategies where mistakes were made. But, herein lies the importance of understanding the process of capital flight through analyses of corporations like the Dwight Manufacturing Company.

Many of the dynamics that were at work in the movement of capital from Chicopee to Alabama City, from Massachusetts to Alabama, and from New England to the Piedmont South between the 1880s and the 1920s are still at work between the United States and nations around the world where industrial production facilities are being built by multi-unit, global corporations. The failure of New England textile locals to focus
their organization and legislative lobbying efforts nationally, instead of locally and regionally, was a fundamental problem for their members and for the entire industry as early as the 1890s. But, even through the “Buy American” campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s, and current efforts of U.S. unions to fight foreign competition through tariff protections and anti-sweatshop campaigns, the primary focus has not been on raising the standards of labor elsewhere to equalize conditions, but largely on protecting jobs where wages and benefits are high by establishing barriers to the marketplace success of products made more cheaply in industrializing nations. This type of parochial outlook proved a fatal flaw for textile unionists, mill owners, and mill towns at the turn of the previous century as they attempted to combat the relocation of their industry from a high-wage region with an established union base to a low-wage, open-shop one. The lesson to learn from these strategies is that they do not work over the long term, and, at the very most, only act to slow capital mobility. Retreating to such an approach will undoubtedly have a similar outcome for corporations, unions, and communities in migrations of capital from nation to nation.

An ongoing challenge presented by industrial globalization is to find a middle ground between job loss and deindustrialization in highly developed nations and job creation and economic growth in lesser developed nations that is responsible, just, and beneficial not only to corporations seeking profits but to workers and the communities in which they live. Many of the roadblocks that late nineteenth and early twentieth-century textile industry management and unions ran into with state regulations, in that they could only be enforced in one state and not nationwide, are similar to those that exist currently with national governments in the global economy. Child labor laws, hours limitations,
and workplace safety standards that regulate businesses and industries in the United States, for example, are not enforced outside of the nation’s boarders even for U.S. companies operating elsewhere. Part of successfully meeting these problems is the creation of an effective means to bring about change and establish labor standards beyond national boarders through organizations, whether they be governmental or non-governmental, with an international membership base that has a voice and impact on global standards equal to that of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

Implicit in the development of this voice is the ability of labor organizations in industrialized nations to embrace an international outlook and, as was necessary for New England textile unionists to do with southern mill hands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to see foreign workers in their industry not as competitors per se, but as co-workers with whom they have a shared cause. As the chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so are the best workplace standards in the most economically advanced nations inexorably tied to the worst that prevail in any industry, and unionists in countries like the United States need to be willing to use their political, financial, and human resources so that the equalization of standards that will undoubtedly occur will raise everyone up rather than push all down. As the labor market of corporations has shifted over time from local to regional, and from regional to national and international, so have the difficulties that workers within the global workforce face in understanding and finding common ground with one another. Whether and how this can be done remain open questions, but a better awareness of processes of capital mobility that have occurred
in the past offer invaluable clues to the pitfalls to avoid, and to strategies that may promise success in the future.
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